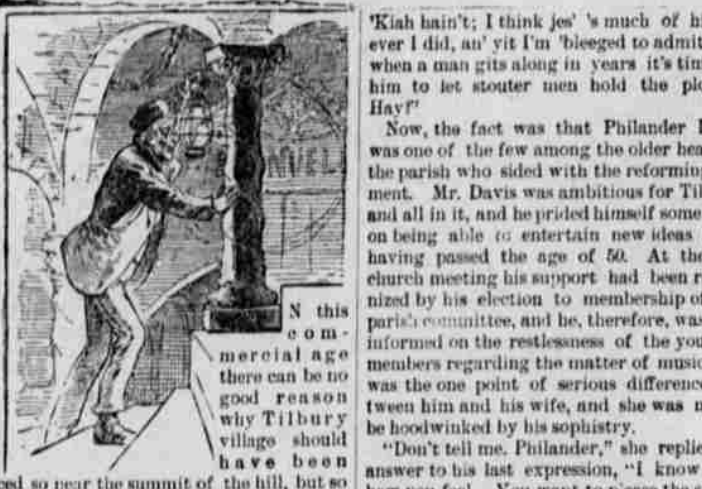
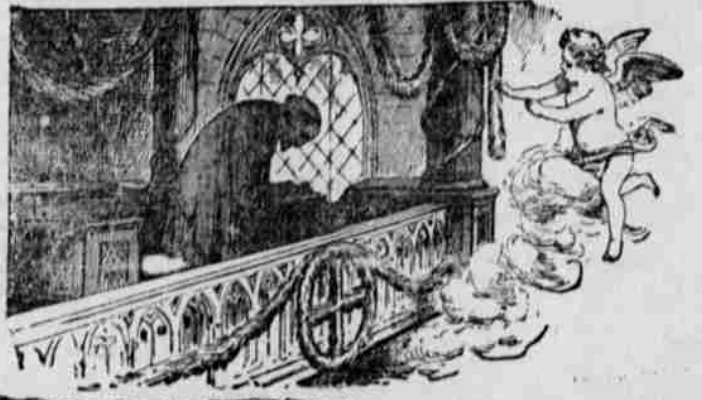


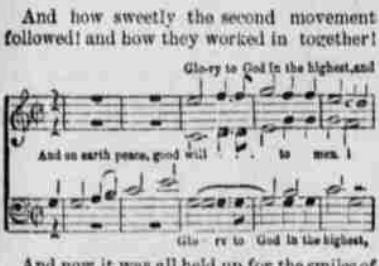
THE OLD CHORISTER



church, the sexton had blown out the lights and locked the heavy doors behind him. Sleigh bells jingled faintly away out of bearing, 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, he 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," "Gloria 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 him, and standing so solemnly 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 sang 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 new-fangled tunes a little book of manuscript music. When he was a young man 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 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 mussy! Hezekiah, wake up! wake up! You'll catch 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.

prise in your honor. They're gon' to sing your piece."

The old chorister broke away from the sexton and lobbied 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.

HEAVEN AND HELL

While forced to dwell apart from my dear face, Love lured with sorrow led me by the hand, And taught my doubting heart to understand That which has puzzled all the human race.

Full many a stage has questioned where in space These counter worlds are, where the mystic strand That separates them I have found each land. And hell is east, and heaven a narrow place.

In the small compass of my sleeping arms, In reach and sight of my dear lips and eyes, There, there, for me, the joy of heaven lies. Outside—no chaos, terrors, wild alarms.

And all the desolation fierce and fell Of void and aching nothingness make hell— Ella Wheeler Wilcox in The Cosmopolitan.

THE ACE OF SPADES.

It was a whirl of black coats and white shoulders, and those of the men who did not dance still remained in the salon to admire the beautiful waiters.

M. d'Arcueil, in his quality of master of the house, was doing his duty by turn with all those women that without his example no one would have thought of inviting. The card room, however, was empty, and at the same moment that Mme. d'Arcueil, across whose charming head twenty five springs had come and gone, perceived the incumberment of her salon, a young officer of 30, perhaps, solicited the honor and happiness of a waltz with her.

"Upon one condition," she responded, "that we have a game of cards first, but I warn you that I know only hearts."

The young officer did not stir, and Mme. d'Arcueil, with that freedom of tone that distinguishes the Parisienne, added smilingly: "Who loves me follows me!"

Immediately not less than twenty of those solemn men who believed it derogatory from their dignity to dance, and who had been invited solely on account of their wives, trooped after her to the card room and placed themselves at table.

"Every one will thank me for this," said she, "and the ladies will be able to move without tearing their trains. Mesieurs, I give you the right to play."

"Lucienne," demanded in a low tone the young officer, "tell me quickly the true meaning of this!"

"Simply that we may have a pretext for talking together without disturbance. Besides, I should have God in the midst of those dancers. But play, Louis, play!"

He obeyed and mechanically distributed the cards, turning up the ace of spades. And they played, but in the handling of the cards, in pronouncing insignificant phrases, in giving change to the players, or chatting graciously with the guests who passed beside them, Lucienne, who was deeply in love, and was experiencing how cruel the torture could be, was forced to bring the same upon her lover.

Her husband, ex-ambassador from France to Spain, had been charged with a secret mission that required a prompt departure. Well, M. d'Arcueil had decided that his wife during his absence, the precise duration of which he was unable to tell, should remain at Andelys, where her family were then residing. And he, Louis de Bremonet, captain in the —, would have no right to leave Paris, since his regiment was on duty there.

As he made this reflection he distributed the cards for the third time, and for the third time the ace of spades was the turn up.

"Again!" cried Louis, "clearly it is significant of something."

a proposition, mad, unrealizable, perhaps without possible result, but you feel the turning of this card portentous of something, and they say there is a genie of play—oh! I call upon it to serve me!

"I'll turn it again, this ace of spades, you will give me the right to tend for you, to call you to me, no matter where, no matter how, no matter at what hour, day or address—and we will find ourselves together—once more. Do you agree to it? Ah, I know what you would say—that my hope is wild, chimerical; that I must give up; so much the worse for me! But you—you risk nothing, it is I who will struggle with the cards, and I—I give you my word upon it—I will do nothing to trick you. You refuse? No, no, you shall not go, or, rather, if you do, I follow you at every sacrifice, despite your husband, except yourself even."

"And you would do this? You would compromise me thus if I decline to subject myself to this mad proposition?"

"I would!"

"Decide!"

"I accept!" she responded, in a shaken voice; "shuffle the cards and begin!"

Louis shuffled them feverishly, then placed them before his vis-a-vis, fixing upon her a look long, piercing, fiery, as if he would compel her by the force of magnetism.

"I wish," said he, "I wish that the ace of spades should be the turn-up! Cut, madame!"

She cut, and Louis distributed the cards. He turned over. It was the ace of spades! "Victory! I have won!" he cried.

"By enchantment, then."

"No, Lucienne, no! I love you—it is the enchantment of love that wins!"

"But my revenge, monsieur, you will permit me to have my revenge!"

"Revenge?"

"Certainly, I desire to play against you. Did you think I would yield without a struggle? If I win the matter ends here."

And as it was not, after all, the game of hearts they were playing, and the turned card was the only one in which they had the slightest interest, Mme. d'Arcueil quickly gathered them together, shuffled them and gave them to her opponent.

"And you wish the turn to be"—

"The queen of hearts."

The eight of clubs showed itself upon the top of the pack. Lucienne had lost.

"Again!" she persisted, "try it again!"

For well did she realize that it was more than the ace of spades that she had promised to obey; that Louis, her lover, would not be dilatory in appointing the rendezvous to which it, this ace of spades, would call her—a rendezvous that, after all, must end in parting; upon which scandal possibly would spy and tattle, and chastisement attend for a reckless, erring wife. Lucienne shuddered.

"I cannot," she cried, "I dare not—I am afraid I dare not abandon my destiny to the will of a card! You are a gallant man, Louis. Release me, I beg of you—release me from this thoughtless promise."

"No; impossible! and if I should you would still suffer the same. I love you—you know it, and I believe that you love me. No, it is impossible!"

Cred meters further away the men were posted who guarded the camp, and mended their uniforms.

De Bremonet, who was not in the least sleepy, not at all in the humor for laughing the country and the repetition of charms of the little music teacher, decidedly weary, not to say bored, by the situation.

"Play cards, then?" cried Louis earnestly, a little sultry, with a tremulous nose; "what do you say, Lucienne, game of cards?"

"I'd play in a minute," said Lucienne, the lieutenant of the troop, "but I'm not, more's the pity!"

"And you, De Bremonet?"

"I'm in no win, I'm with you, spread. And already the 'brass' man, I say, called the orderly who waited on me, had opened one of the camp trunks and was lost in its depths searching for cards in the midst of the chambermaid's objects that soldiers know how to cram into the smallest space. Presently, after a game that left a good deal be desired in the way of comfort and adequate light was preparing to begin between Louis and his friend upon the top of the trunk now closed and serving as a gaming table.

"You'd a great deal better talk," said Lucienne, complainingly, and snatching up a roll of something that had fallen from the trunk as the 'brass' man placed the contents; "it's terrible, kicking my heels while you wait for yourselves 'rounds!" he added, laughing at the package in his hands.

"Here's a find—it's a paper."

"And the game—what shall it be?" demanded De Bremonet, cutting for a card.

"Ecarte, of course, it goes without saying. 'Are you ready?' you wouldn't mind, so—I revenge myself by making you 'Political Bulletin—Paris, April 12, 1870. The Gazette de France refuses to publish 'Oh, enough, enough, Lucienne!' Louis; 'throw it in the fire, man, the stuff!'"

"Will you stop your playing? Will you talk to me?"

"No, I won't!" replied De Bremonet; "voilà! my response—I turn spades of spades!"

"refuses," Lucienne began to say. "Merrey" merrily Lucienne said. De Bremonet's adversary, "picked up" the infernal paper, "give us a rest from politics and finance!"

"Don't listen to him!" said the orderly. "Think of the game! Attention to the turn up, ace of spades!"

"But the news of Paris, the news from Italy, follow the information turn at the news in the province, appointments, the hunt, the balls—"

"Scurrist!" from time to time came the little subaltern, "but it's long a journal!"

Nevertheless the reading went on with it the grumbling—"They had to struggle with the Chamberlain, and with Lucienne and his 'divers' fates."

Again it was De Bremonet's paper that again he turned the ace of spades, you, my readers, the cards pass round to him it said—nothing! Love, just goes so quickly!

"Chronicle of the court," read Lucienne, "legal affairs," but, like love, the paper has its end, the lieutenant comes at last to fatalities, to marriage, deaths.

"Etienne Godefroy, aged 21, Rue Courcelles."

"Aline Bernier, 82, Rue Saint-Hippolyte."

"Jean Lysart, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, means while continuing to march the cards."

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 pleasurable 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 then, and I recall that when the new preacher joined in the movement to abolish the afternoon sermon Hezekiah was one of those who stood hardest for the old custom, and when the inevitable reform was finally accomplished, the sturdy chorister never looked upon his minister in the same light that he had before. He was more faithful than ever and sang all the leader as if to make up in fervor for lack of opportunity; but when the daring divine finally went his way, and another preacher took the pulpit, the chorister felt as if a great burden had been lifted; as if the parish had escaped a most dangerous affliction.

The years turned steadily along and Hezekiah overcame every difficulty that choir leaders are subject to. He pacified the jealous sopranos, raised up new basses, sang four consecutive Sundays all alone when the choir deserted him in high indignation 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, there was a speedy healing of differences and no lack of harmony. Even then Hezekiah felt a vague presentiment that all would not be well with him, but several months passed before he received 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 Hinkleby, one of those very basses 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 27 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 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! Marty, he ain't lost no friends,