

A. Conscript's Christmas.

BY JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS.

From The Century:

As the soldiers approached a dog barked, and then the singing ceased and the figure of a girl appeared in the doorway, only to disappear like a flash. This vision, vanishing with incredible swiftness, was succeeded by a more substantial one in the shape of a motherly looking woman, who stood gazing over her spectacles at the horseman, apparently undecided whether to frown or to smile. The smile would have undoubtedly forced its way to the pleasant face in any event, for the years had fashioned many a pathway for it, but just then Uncle Billy Powers himself pushed the woman aside and made his appearance, laughing.

"Light, boys, light!" he exclaimed, walking nimbly to the gate. "Light whish I off wi' your creetur's gear. Ah!" he went on, as he busied himself unsaddling the horses, "you thought that while your Uncle Billy was a-moonin' aroun' down the hill yander you'd steal a march on your Aunt Crissy, an' maybe come a-conscriptin' of her into the army. But not so—not so! Your Uncle Billy has been here long enough to get his hands an' his face rested."

"You must have been in a tremendous hurry," said Captain Moseley, remembering the weary length of mountain road he had climbed. "Why, I could 'a' took a nap an' 'a' beat you," said the old man.

"Two miles of tough road, I should say," responded Moseley.

"Go straight through my hoss lot and let yourself down by a saplin' or two," said Uncle Billy, "an' it ain't more'n a good quarter." Whereupon the old man laughed heartily.

"Jes leave the creaturs here," he went on. "John Jeems an' Fillmore will ten' to 'em whilst we go an' see what your Aunt Crissy is gwine to give us for supper. You won't find the grub so mighty various, but there is plenty enough of what they is."

There was just enough of deference in Aunt Crissy's greeting to be pleasing, and her unfeigned manifestations of hospitality soon caused the guests to forget that they might possibly be regarded as intruders in that peaceful region. Then there were the two boys, John Jeems and Fillmore, both large enough and old enough, as Captain Moseley quietly observed to himself, to do military service, and both shy and awkward to a degree. And then there was Polly, a young woman grown, whose smiles all ran to blushes and dimples. Though sh was grown, she had the ways of a girl—the vivacity of health and humor, and the innocent shyness of a child of nature. Impulsive and demure by turns, her moods were whimsical and elusive and altogether delightful. Her beauty, which illuminated the whole cabin, was heightened by a certain quality that may be described as individuality. Her face and hands were brown, but in her cheeks the roses of youth and health played constantly. There is nothing more charming to the eye of man than the effects produced when modesty parts company with mere formality and conventionality. Polly, who was as shy as a ground squirrel and

as graceful, never pestered herself about formalities. Innocence is not infrequently a very delightful form of boldness. It was so in the case of Polly powers, at any rate.

The two rough soldiers, unused to the society of women, were far more awkward and constrained than the young woman, but they enjoyed the big fire and the comfortable supper none the less on that account. When, to employ Mrs. Powers's vernacular, "the things were put away," they brought forth their pipes; and they felt so contented that Captain Moseley reproved himself by suggesting that it might be well for them to proceed on their journey up the mountain. But their hosts refused to listen to such a proposal.

"Not so," exclaimed Uncle Billy; "by no means. Why, if you knew this hill like we all, you'd hoot at the bar' idee of gwine further after nightfall. Besides," the old man went on, looking keenly at his daughter, "ten to one you won't find Spurlock."

(To be Continued.)

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