

A Conscript's Christmas.

BY JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS.

From The Century:

There was a sound of shuffling in the next room, and then Uncle Billy came into the room, bearing in his stalworth arms a big rocking-chair containing a little old man whose body and limbs were shriveled and shrunken. Only his head, which seemed to be abnormally large, had escaped the ravages of whatever disease had seized him. His eyes were bright as a bird's, and his forehead was noble in its proportion.

"Gentlemen," said Uncle Billy, "this here is Colonel Dick Watson. He used to be a big politician in his day an' time. He's my father-in-law."

Uncle Billy seemed to be wonderfully proud of his connection with Colonel Watson. As for the colonel, he eyed the strangers closely, forgetting, apparently, to respond to their salutation.

"I reckon you think it's mighty fine, these 'ere business er gwine to war whar they hain't nobody but peaceable folks," exclaimed the colonel, his shrill, metallic voice being in curious contrast to his emaciated figure.

"Daddy!" said Mrs. Powers in a warning tone.

"Lord A'mighty! don't pester me, Crissy Jane. Hain't I done seed war before? When I was in the legislotur didn't the boys rig up an' march away to Mexico? But you know yourself," the colonel went on, turning to Uncle Billy's guests, "that this hain't Mexico, an' that they hain't no war gwine on on this 'ere hill. You know that mighty well!"

"But there's a tolerable big one going on over yonder," said Captain Moseley, with a sweep of the hand westward.

"Now you don't say!" exclaimed Colonel Watson, sarcastically. "A big war goin' on an' you all quiled up here before the fire, out'n sight an' out'n hearing! Well, well, well!"

"We are on business," said Captain Moseley, gently.

"Toony shore!" said the colonel, with a sinister screech that was intended to simulate laughter. "You took the words out'n my mouth. I was i-v-a-b-u-t ready to say it when you upped an' said it yourself. War gwine on over yander an' you all up here on business. Crissy Jane," remarked the colonel in a different tone, "come here an' wipe my face an' see ef I'm a-sweatin'. Ef I'm a-sweatin', hit's the first time since Sadday before last."

Mrs. Powers mopped her father's face, and assured him that she felt symptoms of perspiration.

"Oh, yes!" continued the colonel. "Business here an' war yander. I here that you 'er after Spurlock. Lord A'mighty above us! What 'er you after Isral for? He hain't got no niggers for to fight for. All the fightin' he can do is to fight for his ole mammy."

Captain Moseley endeavored to explain to Colonel Watson why his duty made it imperatively necessary to carry Spurlock back to the conscript camp, but in the midst of it all the old man cried out:

"Oh, I know who sent you!"

"Who?" the captain said.

"Nobody but Weslev Lovejoy!"

Captain Moseley made no response, but gazed into the fire. Chadwick on the other hand, when

Lovejoy's name was mentioned, slapped himself on the leg, and straightened himself up with the air of a man who has made an interesting discovery.

"Come, now," Colonel Watson insisted, "hain't it so? Did n't Weslev Lovejoy send you?"

"Well," said Moseley, "a man named Lovejoy is on Colonel Watson's staff, and he gave me my orders."

At this the old man fairly shrieked with laughter, and so sinister was its emphasis that the two soldiers felt the cold chills creeping up their backs.

"What's the matter with Lovejoy?" It was Chadwick who spoke.

"Oh, wait!" cried Colonel Watson; "thies wait. You may n't want to wait, but you'll have to. I may look like I'm mighty puny, an' I speck I am, but I haint dead yit. Lord A'mighty no! Not by long shot."

(To be Continued.)

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