A Conscript's Christmas

BY JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

From The Century:

"Ner me nuther," said the hunchback, in the cheerfulest manner. "An' then thar's Spurlock—Lord yes; I han't axt him about it, but I bet a hoss he don't like to be dogged after nuther."

"My friend," said Captain Moseley "you seem to have a quick tongue. What is your name?"

"Danny Lemmons," said the other. "Now don't say I look like I ought to be squeeze. Ever'body figgerlly says that," he went on with a grimace, "but I've squeeze lots more than what's ever squeeze me. Lord, yes! Yes, siree! men an' gals tergether. You ax 'em an' they'll tell you."

"Lemmons," said the captain, repeating the name slowly. "Well, you look it."

"Boo!" cried Danny Lemmons, making a horrible grimance; "you don't know what you're a-talkin' about. The gals all 'low I'm mighty sweet. You ought to see me when I'm rigged out in m Sunday go to meetin' duds. Polly Powers she 'lows I look snatchin'. 'Lord, yes! Yes, siree! I'm goin' down to Po'ly's house now."

Whereat he broke out singing, paraphrasing an old negro ditty, and capering about in the woods like mad.

Oh, I went down to Polly's house,
An' she was not at home;
I set myself in a big arm cheer
An' beat on the ol' jaw-bone
Oh, rise up Polly! Slap 'im on the jaw,
An' hit 'im in the eyeball—him!

The song finished, Danny Lemmons walked on down the road ahead of the horse in the most unconcerned manner. It was part of Captain Moseley's plan to stop at Mrs. Spurlock's and inquire for Israel. This seemed to be a part of Danny's plan also, for he turned out of the main road and went ahead, followed by the captain. There were quite a number of men at Mrs. Spurlock's when Moseley rode up, and he noticed that all were armed. Some were standing listlessly about, leaning against the trees, some were sitting in various postures, and others were squatting around whittling; but all had their guns within easy reach. Mrs. Spurlock was walking about among them smoking her pipe. By the strained and awkward manner of the men as they returned his salutation, or by some subtle instinct he could not explain, Captain Moseley knew that these men were waiting for him, and that he was their prisoner. The very atmosphere seemed to proclaim the fact. Under his very eyes Danny Lemmons changed from a grinning buffoon into a quiet, self contained man trained to the habit of command. Recognizing the situation, the old soldier made the most of it by retaining his wood humor.

"Well, boys," he said, flinging a leg over the pommel of his saddle, "I hope you are not tired of waiting for me. The men exchanged glances in a curious shame-faced sort of way.

"No," said one; "we was thes a-settin' here talkin' 'bout ol' times. We 'lowed maybe you'd get sorter tangled up on the hill thar, and so Danny Lemmons, he harked back for to keep a' eye on you."

There was no disposition on the part of this quiet group of men to be clamerous or boasftul. There was a certain shyness in their attitude, as of men willing to apologize for what might seem to be unnecessary rudeness.

I'll tell you what," said Danny Lemmons, "they ain't a man on the mounting that's got a blessed thing agin you ner agin the tother feller, an' they hain't a man anywheres aroun' here that's a-gwine to pester you. We never brung you whar you is; but now that you're here we're a-gwine to whirl in an' ast you to stay an' take Christmas wi' us, sech ez we 'll have. Lord, yes! a nice time we 'll have, ef I ain't forgot how to finger the fiddle-strings. We 're sorter in a quandery," Danny Lemmons continued, observing Captain Moseley toying with the handle of his pistol. "We don't know whether you're a-gwine to be worried enough to start a row, or wheth r you're a-gwine to work up trouble

[To be Continued.]

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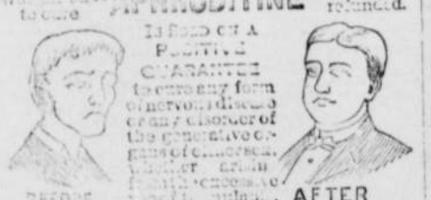

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