A Conscript's Christmas.

BY JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS.

From The Century:

Meanwhile Danny Lemmons had brought his long rifle into a position where it could be used promptly and effectually. For answer Moseley dismounted from his horse, unbuckled his belt and flung it across his saddle, and prepared to light his pipe.

"Now, then," said Danny Lemmons, thes make your self at home.

Nothing could have been friendlier than the attitude of the mountain men, nor freer than their talk. Captain Moseley learned that Danny Lemmons was acting under the orders of Colonel Dick Watson, the virile peralytic; that he and Chadwick were to be held prisoners in the hope that Adjutant Lovejoy would come in search of them—in which event there would be developments of a most interesting character.

So Danny Lemmons said, and so it turned out; for one day while Moseley and Chadwick were sitting on the sunny side of Uncle Billy's house, listening to the shrill snarling tones of Colonel Watson, they heard a shout from the roadside, and behold, there was Danny Lemmons and his little band escorting Lovejoy and a small squad of forlorn-looking militia. Lovejoy was securely bound on his horse, and it may be well supposed that he did not cut an imposing figure. Yet he was undaunted. His eyes never lost their boldness, nor his tongue its bitterness. He was almost a match for Colonel watson, who raved at all things through the tremulous and vindictive lips of disease. The colonel's temper was fitful, but Lovejoy's seemed to burn steadily. Moved by contempt rather than caution, he was economical in his words, listening to the shrill invective of the colonel patiently, but with a curious flicker of his thin lips that caused Danny Lemmons to study him intently. It was Danny Lemmons who discovered that Lovejoy's eyes never wandered in Polly's direction, nor settled on her, nor seemed to perceive that she was in existence, though she was flitting about constantly on the aimless little errands that keep a conscientious housekeeper busy.

Lovejoy was captured one morning and Christmas fell the next, and it was a memorable Christmas to all concerned. After breakfast Mncle Billy Powers produced his Bible and preached a little sermon—a sermon that was not the less meaty and sincere, not the less wise and powerful, because the English was ungrammatical and the rhetoric uncouth. After it was over the old man cleared his throat and remarked.

"Brethren, we're gethered here for to praise the Lord an' do his will. The quare times that's come on us has brung us face to face with much that is unseamly in life, an' likely to fret the spirit an' vex the understandin'. Yit the Almighty is with us; an', in accordance wi' the commands delivered in this book, we're here to fortify two souls in the'r choice, an' to b'ar testimony to the Word that makes lawful marriage a sacrament."

With that, Mncle Billy, fumbling in his coat pockets, produced a marriage license, called Israel Spurlock and his daughter before him, and in simple fashion pronounced the words that made them man and wife.

The dinner that followed hard on the wadding was to the soldiers, who had been subsisting on the tough rations furnished by the Confederate commissioners, by all odds the chief event of the day. To them the resources of the Powers household were wonderful indeed. The shed-room, running the whole length of the house and kitchen, was utilized, and the dinner table, which was much too small to accommodate the guests, invited and uninvited, was supplemented by the inventive genius of Private W. Chadwick, who, in the most unassumed manner, had taken control of the whole affair. He proved himself to be an invaluable aid, and his good humor gave a lightness and a zest to the occasion that would have otherwise have been sadly lacking.

[To be Continued.]

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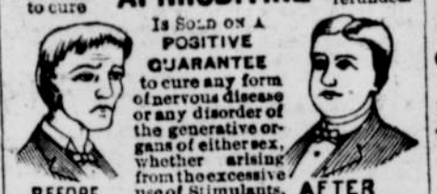

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