

THE CHRISTMAS STOCKING.

In the ghostly light I'm sitting musing of long dead Decembers. While the fire-circles are fitting in and out among the embers. On my hearthstone in mad races, and I marvel, for in seeming I can dimly see the faces and the scenes of which I'm dreaming. O golden Christmas days of yore! In sweet anticipation I lived their joys for days before Their glorious realization.

UNCLE JERRY'S CHRISTMAS.

UNCLE JERRY Foster was too stingy to live, and everybody knew it. But everybody didn't know how poor Aunt Betsey, his wife, had to manage and contrive and skimp to get along. She never had the handling of any money. Even the butter and egg money, that most every farmer's wife has for her own use, all went into Uncle Jerry's pockets; and if she wanted a new gown or a bonnet or a pair of shoes—I hadn't ever say if she wanted 'em, but if she must have 'em, and there wasn't no possible way for him to skin out o' gettin' 'em—then Uncle Jerry would go to the store with her and buy 'em and pay for 'em, just as if she was a child or an idiot, and incapable o' devin' business on her own hook.

If Aunt Betsey hadn't had the best disposition in the world, she wouldn't stood it all them years. As it was, it wore on her, and told on her fearful. Though Uncle Jerry was one o' the richest men in town, she might 'n' been the wife o' the poorest and miserliest, so fur's any outward indication was concerned—or inward indications, either—for she was always half starved, and wasn't nothin' but skin and bones, as you might say.

Uncle Jerry grew wuss 'n' wuss, and come along towards Christmas he got a bran-new crocheter for savin' into his head. It was at family devotion one mornin', jest before the readin', that he divulged it to his wife. He finds the place in Nehemiah—he always read the long chapters in fall and winter—and puts his thumb in to keep it, then, drawin' on a long face, he looks at Aunt Betsey over his spectacles, and says he:

"Wife, I are of a notion that this 'ere Christmas business is all foolishness! Seems if it must be a sin in the sight o' the Lord to eat so much one day in the year. I don't believe it's necessary to make pigs 'n' gluttons of ourselves in order to have thankful hearts; and if we go to meetin', and so on, why ain't that enough? I reckon we'll sell the turkey this year and have our usual dinner, 'long's there ain't no children comin' home, nor nothin'."

Aunt Betsey set there with her hands in her lap, not exactly thinkin', but kinder wonderin' and grievin'. And when they kneeled down to pray she kept on wonderin' more'n ever. She wondered what she had to be thankful for, anyway. "Now, if Ellen could come home!" Ellen was their daughter, all the child they had in the world, and she lived so far away that she couldn't afford to come home and bring the children—bein' she was a widder and poor—but, oh, how her mother did want her! "What did she care about turkey and plum puddin' if Ellen and the children couldn't eat it with her? Yes, the money might as well be put in



"YOUR WIFE IS A VERY SICK WOMAN," the bank; she didn't care." So she thought on and on, not hardly sensin' the price a mite. She went out to her work in the kitchen feelin' all broke up. She didn't know why she should be, 'less she'd been kinder secretly hopin' to have Ellen and the children. Christmas was more than she

OLD FATHER TIME RECEIVES THE NEW YEAR.



could bear. There wa'n't nothin' to her, no time, as you might say, and this was the last straw on the camel's back. "T any rate, all to once she give out and had to go ter bed. The next mornin' she couldn't get up, but Uncle Jerry didn't think much about it, s'posed she'd be up bimeby; but when he come in to dinner, there lay his wife jest the same, as if she hadn't no thoughts o' gettin' up.

He didn't know what under the sun to do, but he knew he must do somethin', so he bet a brick and put to her feet, and was jest making a mustard plaster to put on her somewhere when Miss Hopkins happened in.

She see how it was with Aunt Betsey in a minute. She's awful cute about some things, Miss Hopkins is, and she ain't afraid o' no man livin'.

"Uncle Jerry," says she, matter of fact as you please, "your wife's a very sick



UNCLE JERRY SET PALE AS A STATUE.

woman, and she's goin' to die right off, I'm afraid, 'less we hyper round a do somethin', and do it quick. But fust I'd better step over 'n' fetch the doctor."

Uncle Jerry was wonderful took down. All of a sudden he realized that his wife was invaluable to him; he felt that he could not get along without her, nohow. He was as anxious to have the doctor as Miss Hopkins was, and told her to hurry and bring him.

So she went—he lived near by—and she says to him: "Doctor Cross, now is your chance to do a deed o' humanity, and put a spoke in Uncle Jerry Foster's wheel for all time! If he's got any heart and feelin' you must find 'em and work on 'em for his wife's sake. It would be cruel to bring her back to life, 'less you can do somethin' to make that life endurable. Don't, I beg on ye, raise her up to live on in the same old skimpy miser'ble way! Better let her die and done with it."

They discussed and considered over the matter for a few minutes, then went together to the house. They found Aunt Betsey layin' just the same only she stopped cryin'. The doctor examined her and dingeressed her case as well as he could, then he motioned Uncle Jerry out into the other room and s'het the door behind him.

It seems the doctor took him awful solemn and in dead earnest, and says he, to begin with: "Uncle Jerry, do you set high vally on your wife's life?"

"High vally on my wife's life?" says Uncle Jerry, red in the face. "Of course I dew. What you talkin' about?" "I was here when you fetched her home a bride. I remember how handsome she was; plump as a partridge, fresh as a flower, and as laughin' and chipper a girl as I 'bout ever see. Changed, terribly changed, ain't she?" turnin' to Uncle Jerry and feelin' in his pocket fer his handkerchief to wipe away the tears. "It does beat all how she's changed," says he. "Changed!" says Uncle Jerry, if o' a duster, "of course she's changed! Why, we've been married goin' on 25 year! You can't expect a woman to stay 18 all her life!"

they're different from your wife, and why? I ask you fair and candid, why shouldn't she look as happy, be as happy and make as good a 'pearance every way as them women? And why is it that she has took to her bed in the prime o' life and don't want her live no longer? For I find that's about the way it is with her."

When Uncle Jerry came back he went up to the bed and sat down 'beside his wife and looked at her. She was asleep, and Miss Hopkins thought he must 'a realized how pitiful she looked for she seen him draw his hand across his eyes two or three times on the sly.

Bimeby he got up and went out to Miss Hopkins, and, says he: "What was the doctor's orders? What can I do to help 'er?"

"He ordered nourishin' food, and wine, and so on," she says, "and I guess the fust thing you may kill a chicken, if you're minter, and git it ready for the broth; then go over to Jim Jackson's and buy a quart or so of that oldest grape wine o' his'n. She'll be awake by the time you get back with it, I guess."

Uncle Jerry didn't so much as wink at mention of the chicken, but when she spoke o' the wine so offhand and matter o' course he drawed in his breath once or twice kinder spasmodicky, but he never opened his head.

When the broth was ready Uncle Jerry asked if he might take it in; so Miss Hopkins filled one of the chiny bowls that was Aunt Betsey's mar's and set it in a plate with a cracker or two, and he took 'em along.

The broth was good and strong, and when Aunt Betsey tasted out she looked at her husband real kinder scairt, and, says she: "Where did this 'ere come from?" And he 'laughed and says: "It's made out o' one of our best Plymouth Rocks; is it wonderin'?"

A wonderin', quiverin' smile hovered for a minute on to her poor face; she didn't know what to make on't. But when he lugged in the jug o' wine and poured out a half a tumbler full and handed it to her, her eyes fairly stuck out of her head with astonishment.

"Drink it; it'll do you good," says he. "It's Jim Jackson's oldest grape wine you've heard tell on."

"Why—why, husband!" she whispered, "didn't it cost an awful sight o' money?" "Only \$3 a gallon," he answered, tryin' to smile, but lookin' rather ghastly. She sipped it slow, eyin' him over the top o' the tumbler as she done so; but pretty soon she set it down and spoke again, awful mechin', and 'pealin', her lips tremblin' as if she was going to cry.

"I'm sorry to put you to so much expense, husband. I'm afraid—I'm afraid it ain't wuth while!"

He got up and blowed his nose with all his might and main. "I want you to get well, Betsey. I want you to get well!" he managed to say.

The strangest expression come into her face you ever see in any creature's. Then, as if struck by somethin' in his looks, she seemed to get a dim idee that he was different, and she tried to make out how it was, but couldn't, and, bein' too tired and weak to think much, she jest s'het her eyes and give it all up.

That night Uncle Jerry harnessed the old mare and went over and got Mary Buell to come 'n' stay with 'em a spell. Mary's an excellent good hand in cases o' sickness, and bein' an old maid, she's always ready to go and dew fer the neighbors. She's a prime nuss and housekeeper, and she's a good company, too—jest the kind o' person to cheer Aunt Betsey up, you know. Wall, it come along the day



IN TROOPED A PARCEL O' CHILDREN.

fore Christmas, and Aunt Betsey lay back in her easy chair in the cheerful sittin' room. A pitcher full of late fall flowers stood on the mantelshelf; a cracklin' fire was burnin' in the open fireplace, and the old tabby cat lay before it on the rug, purrin' for all she was wuth—a perfect pictur' of content.

The door was open into the kitchen, and she could see Mary steppin' round about her work, gettin' ready for to-morrer. She could smell the stuffin' for the turkey, and the plum puddin' bakin' in the oven. She knew there was a hull shelf full o' pies in the pantry—she see 'em yesterday—six mince, six punkin, three apple 'n' three cranberry tart. She thought it was too many to make at once; and seemed so strange. She sighed and laid her head back, with the old look on her face. She was thinkin' of Ellen and the children.

She sat there, blannin' herself and thinkin' what a poor, weak kind of a mother she was, till the tears rolled down her cheeks. Then, all at once, she heard a noise outside.

The stage had stopped, and there was the sound o' voices talkin' and laughin', and of feet hurryin' up the steps. The door opened—no, it was burst open—and in trooped a parcel o' children, and behind 'em, not far behind, with her hands stretched out and the happy tears streamin' down her pretty face, come her daughter Ellen!

"How them two kissed and clung to one 'n' other, till the children got out o' patience and wouldn't wait no longer for their turn! Then Uncle Jerry came to the resky and says, betwixt laughin' and cryin':

"There, there, children! I guess that'll dew! It's my turn now," and he took her to the lounge where she could lay and rest and still be with 'em all. She pulled him down to her and kissed him and whispered:

"Oh, husband, how good you be! You've made me the happiest woman in the world!" Uncle Jerry got away as quick as he could, and went out to the barn and set down on the hay cutter and laughed and wiped his eyes till he was some calmer. Then he fell on his knees and thanked God reverently for showin' him before he died what true happiness wuz, and how to get it for himself by bestowin' it on others.—New York Tribune.

Another Year Is Dawning.

Another year is dawning! Dear Master, let it be, In working or in waiting. Another year with Thee, Another year is leavin', Upon Thy loving breast O, ever-deepening trustfulness, Of quiet, happy rest. Another year of meekness, Of faithfulness and grace; Another year of gladness, In the shining of Thy face. Another year of progress, Another year of praise; Another year of proving Thy presence all the days. Another year of service, Of witness for Thy love; Another year of training, For holier works above. Another year is dawning! Dear Master, let it be, On heaven or else in heaven. Another year for Thee.

Don'ts About Gifts.

Don't above all things ask the giver whether you may exchange her gift. Don't forget that it is the inward spirit that makes the real value of the offering. Don't express dissatisfaction with a gift, no matter how great your disappointment. Don't above all things be guilty of making a list of articles you desire. This is a species of polite blackmail. Don't, even in your innermost self, speculate as to whether your gift will bring a return, and above all a return in monetary value. Don't forget that the chief charm of a gift is essentially the surprise. Don't, therefore, barter with a friend as to reciprocal gifts. Don't, if you have neglected to remember a friend, wound her pride by sending a New Year's gift in exchange for her Christmas present. The motive is too apparent.

Another Altered Will.

Little Alice—Mamma says she ain't going to give you anything for Christmas this year. Papa's Maiden Sister—Oh, she isn't, eh? Why not? Little Alice—"Cause the present she give you last year was worth twice as much as what you give us.

Will Receive Calls.

"Do you expect to receive calls on New Year's day?" asked Willie Hicollar. "Yes," answered Mamie Hollerton; "I'll have to. The telephone exchange where I work wouldn't give me the day off. Isn't it mean?"—Washington Star.

A Clincher.

Mrs. Cobwigger—You are to ask only one more question the whole evening, Freddie—Then, ma, if Santa Claus really brings the presents why am I not to look out of the window if an express wagon drives up to the door?—Judge.

A Definition of Christmas.

Sunday School Teacher—Johnny, what does Christmas mean? Johnny—My pa says Christmas means swappin' a lot o' things you can't afford for a lot o' things you don't want.—Life.

CHRISTMAS MUSINGS.

White'er the facts or fancies of our creed, They are divine if they but serve our need; And hence the brightness of that glorious Gem, That still is called "The Star of Bethle-hem."

A Star, beyond all other stars, designed; To shed a purer lustre on mankind; And through the various lenses of the soul To warm and cheer and elevate the whole.

And what, although its broad supernal beams May be but concentrations of the gleams That lit up many an eastern Buddha's breast, To shed erewhile their radiance o'er the west?

White'er the grade or color of the flame, In essence, light and love are all the same, Both myth and-mystery must to all things cling. Else Progress has no source from whence to spring.

Here none superior knowledge may assume, As mind and matter are conceived in gloom; Nor has a Veda or Apocalypse Dispelled one cloud of the profound eclipse.

But see! amid our happy homes we stand, With peace and joy widespread throughout the land. While merry little household Christs are born Of every song and smile this Christmas morn.

Then let our inmost souls ascend in praise To that mysterious power who guides our way; And let us truly thank him, one and all, For all his Christs and Vedas, great and small.

But, oh, alas! that we should only see His love and care in full prosperity! Or that discomfort for a single hour Should prompt us to deny his fostering power!

Oh! when shall it be clearly understood That all's but the darkest shade of good; That in some great equation may be bleat Darkness as though 'twere light's true complement?

But now that we are all assembled here On this glad day, the white stone of the year— As on this elevated plane we stand, Let us give those below a helping hand.

Let each produce what treasures he has got From any love he loves—no matter what; But all the Christian needs, on his account, Will simply be "the Sermon on the Mount."—Jeness-Miller Monthly.

A FLORIDA CHRISTMAS.

How the Happy Day Is Celebrated in a Fair Southern City.

CHRISTMAS in Florida is a novel experience to Northerners. There the manner of observing this holiday is more like a Fourth of July celebration than anything else. The incessant firing of torpedoes and fire-crackers in the middle of the day and the display of pyrotechnics in the evening rob the day of much of its mythological and sacred significance. A stroll through a typical town in the realm of fruits and flowers gives a person from the North some startling ideas. The show windows are full of firecrackers, Roman candles, sky rockets, packages of torpedoes and other fireworks. The July weather is present, aquatic and field sports are carried out in accordance with a regular picnic program, and the sight of thousands in holiday attire on a race track, the borders of some pretty lake or a baseball park, gives little hint of a celebration which at the North is attended with sleighing, skating and Christmas trees.

Only in the churches is the commemoration suggestive and familiar. In some of these a great Christmas ship, with evergreen-trimmed masts, is displayed. Bright little lads and pretty maids dressed in white and carrying tinsel wands distribute presents to everybody. In the negro quarters, too, the real yuletide fervor is shown. No one loves a holiday better than a negro, and the eating, drinking and singing in the rough, boarded huts is engaged in with ardent zeal.

Through latticed windows and open doors may be seen the smoking turkey and 'possum, hoe cake, pumpkin pies and watermelons. The patriarchal colored preacher summons all his dusky clientele to the rickety frame church in the afternoon or evening, fixing the minds of his auditors on the sin of chicken stealing and wandering in the white folks' orange groves after midnight. Then all hands join in the chorus of the old Christmas song:

Shin' on, shin' on; Doan' git weary, chillun! Shin' on, shin' on— Oh, Jerusalem!

The weird chanting, accompanied by the regular tapping of the feet of the singers on the pine floor, is followed by an adjournment to some large barn, where the music from the negro orchestra's violins and banjos for hours keep up the dance, between fragments of— "All de darkeys am a weepin'." "Massa's in de cold, cold groun'." "Suwanee River," the plaintive strains being wafted sweetly through the swaying pines.

"Well?"



"Need Not Interfere." "I don't see your mistletoe," said he, glancing up at the chandelier. "Is it really necessary?" replied she, archly. "It wasn't."—Judge.

The Flirt.

The mistletoe she keeps in view, And though she says she won't, She's angry with you if you do, And cuts you if you don't.