

# UNCLE FRANK

How He Contrived a Merry Christmas

By F. A. MITCHEL

When Mr. and Mrs. Luther Elwood agreed to separate they left everything pertaining to their separation to Frank Elwood, the husband's brother, who was a lawyer. This meant not only that he was to procure the divorce, but to arrange for the care of the children, and he was given carte blanche to take any measure in the premises he might see fit.

Frank placed all the blame for the trouble on his brother, who had been somewhat gay during his bachelorhood and was not inclined to give up his attentions to other women after his marriage. His wife was very rigid as to the actions of her husband and made him feel that he was too circumscribed. Frank endeavored to convince his brother that the home was of far more importance than the pleasure to be derived from attentions to any woman who would so far demean herself as to accept them from another woman's husband, and he had better accede to his wife's wishes and confine himself to her. But Luther declared that his attentions to other women were harmless and he did not propose to be dictated to by a jealous woman.

Whereupon the lawyer laid down the following plan for the couple's guidance: Both should leave the home and reside elsewhere. The children were to be left where they were under the care of a woman to be provided for the purpose. The father and mother would be permitted to visit their offspring once a month, the father on the 1st, the mother on the 15th. The lawyer agreed to procure the divorce as soon as possible.

This plan was objected to by both parties, whereupon Frank Elwood declared that he would have nothing to do with the matter. But it was essential that the care of the children be provided for while the divorce proceedings were pending, and, since the couple could find no one else on whom they could agree to manage the affair, they finally gave in and left it in Frank's hands.

In June Frank Elwood informed his brother and his sister-in-law that their legal separation would be completed in six months. On the 20th of December he notified them that the decree would be granted early in January and he desired them to call at his office on the 21st of December for the purpose of making certain transfers of property that had been agreed upon out of court. On the 21st he informed them that the papers would not be ready for signature till after office hours the next day. He therefore appointed the meeting to take place at their home at 5 p. m. sharp.

"Tomorrow evening," exclaimed Luther Elwood. "Why, that's Christmas eve."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Edith Elwood. "The awful man, to bring us together at our old home for such a purpose on Christmas eve!"

The attorney was called to the telephone by both parties for the purpose of protesting against the place of meeting, and both were answered that the hearing appointing in the building where Frank had his office was out of commission, that no other place was available, that a winter storm which was raging rendered it necessary that some warm place should be selected and that the place provided would be both warm and comfortable. This ended the argument, and both the husband and wife gave a reluctant assent.

At a quarter to 5 Mrs. Elwood ran up the steps of what had been her home, rang the bell and was admitted by a maid who had been in her employ ever since her marriage.

"Christine," she said, "I have an appointment here at 5 and have come ahead of time in order to see the children."

"Yes'm. I'll tell Mrs. Albright."

The lady went into the living room and stood before a fire blazing brightly on the hearth. The maid went upstairs and returned with a message from the woman who had the care of the children that she had no orders from Mr. Frank Elwood to permit Mrs. Elwood to see the children except on her regular day.

This was, indeed, a disappointment. The mother wiped away a tear, then began pacing back and forth before the fire till there was a ring at the doorbell and her husband was ushered into the room. He bowed deferentially, but the wife did not return his salute. He took a seat by the fire, and she sat down as far from him as possible. Neither spoke till the clock struck 5, when the husband remarked: "Frank said we were to be punctual. He is going to be late himself."

"He should be ashamed to bring us together here, of all places, on Christmas eve."

"Perhaps he did it for my benefit. Being a bachelor, he doubtless understands that a club is no place for a man at Christmas time."

"One would suppose that this home, into which you brought me a happy wife, would be the last place you would wish to come on Christmas eve, especially since you broke the promise you then made."

"I didn't break any promises. It

was simply your inordinate jealousy that rendered life unbearable. This separation has been all your fault."

"Not at all; it has been yours. But we have not met for reexamination."

"You are right. For my part, I am content to await Frank's coming and then have the whole affair over with forever."

"Yes, forever."

He drew a newspaper from his pocket and began to read. She took up a book. Several minutes of silence passed, when the maid appeared and said: "Please, ma'am, Mrs. Albright has just had a telephone from Mr. Frank to say that he can't come for half an hour. He says that to pass the time you may both see the children, if you like."

"I'll go to them at once," said Edith. "Mr. Frank said that they were to be brought in here."

There was no need for further discussion, for a racket was heard on the landing above, and four youngsters, the oldest a boy of eleven, the youngest a girl of four, came tumbling downstairs with shouts and whoops, and, rushing into the room, the boys jumped into their mother's arms, the girls into their father's.

"Oh mamma, we're so glad you've come back for Christmas!"

"Oh papa, we're so glad you've come back for Christmas!"

"And we're so glad you're not going away any more too."

"Who told you that?" asked the father.

"Uncle Frank."

By this time the children, in order that they might express both parents at once, had drawn them so near together that father, mother, boys and girls were mingled in a single group.

"What have you got for me for Christmas, mamma?"

"What have you got for me for Christmas, papa?"

"I want a holiday horse."

"I want a drum."

"I want a doll with a wax head and light curly hair and eyes that close when she goes to sleep."

These few requests do not express the din that greeted the parents. They are merely given to enable the reader to form some idea of that din.

The father and mother gave each other a meaning look.

"Edith," said the father, "this is Frank's doing. He has doubtless surmised that I have learned that women who don't care a snap of their fingers for me are a mighty poor substitute for this."

"And you're going to stay with us for Christmas, always? Say yes, mamma. Say yes, papa."

There was a ring at the doorbell.

A polite expression returned to the faces of the husband and the wife. Frank was coming with the papers they were to sign. When he came in he stood at the doorway looking into the room at the scene before him. Father and mother were in the center, the children crowding around them.

"Frank, you needn't stand there. This is your doing."

"Well, if it is I never did a better job."

"It all came true, Uncle Frank, didn't it?"

"What came true, dear?" asked the mother.

"Why, Uncle Frank told us that if we could wait till Christmas he promised that we should have you both home again to stay ever so long."

"Uncle Frank is right, sweetheart," said the father. "Our being away from you so long is all papa's fault, and he won't ever do so any more. He promises his little boys and girls that."

This statement was received with a clapping of hands and a shower of kisses for papa, each child struggling for place to impart the kiss.

"Where are you going, Uncle Frank?" called one of the children, seeing that Frank Elwood was making for the door.

"I'm going to spend a bachelor's Christmas all alone by myself. If I had such a home as this you had better believe I wouldn't do anything to pull it down over my head and over the heads of a good woman and a lot of innocent children."

"Right you are, Frank. But you're not going to spend your Christmas alone. You're going to spend it right here in the home you've saved from a permanent wreck."

The mother said nothing. She dared not trust her voice to speak. She went to Frank, put her arms around his neck and kissed him, while one of the girls took his hat away from him, and the youngest boy, seizing his cane, capered around the room using it for a horse.

Christine entered and announced dinner.

"Dinner!" exclaimed Elwood. "I thought we were brought here for another purpose than dinner. Can it be true that we are all to dine together in our own home on Christmas eve with our own children?"

"And Uncle Frank," put in one of the boys.

"Did you provide the dinner, Frank?" asked Mrs. Elwood. "I thought you were rather given to providing essentials of another kind."

"I had nothing to do with providing this dinner, but I will admit I ordered one for tomorrow."

That was the end of the troubles for the Elwood family. The Christmas they spent united was made the more delightful in contrast with the Christmas before, at which they were separated and their sudden and unexpected coming together.

But the central figure of that Christmas celebration, the mighty hero, was Uncle Frank, who really seemed to enjoy it all as much as if the family belonged to him. He is married now and has children of his own, but he deems that any Christmas in his own home has been happier than the one he spent at the reunion of his brother's family.

## Go Home For Christmas

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### FARM MANAGEMENT.

#### Demonstrators Point Out How Changes in Farming Methods Will Increase Profit.

From weekly news letter U. S. D. A. Every community of farmers studied as a few farmers who are much more successful than their neighbors, according to those engaged in the management demonstration work carried on by the department in cooperation with a number of the Southern and Western States. As far as the work has gone in 21 states it has been found that out of any group of 25 farmers who are operating under similar conditions, one may always pick a dozen or more whose labor incomes are on the average from \$600 to \$2,000 better than the average of all. A difference of from \$500 to \$2,000 between the better farmers and the average is very common.

These more successful farmers can not be picked with any certainty by their mere appearance, or by their good crops; by their fine live stock, or even by their large financial returns from a single crop, or kind of live stock. It is not unusual to find on farms which make a very fine appearance are making their operators from \$500 to \$2,000 less labor income than are others which do not look so prosperous. It seems that the only safe way to compare the efficiency of any given farmer with that of others in his community is to compare the labor incomes which they receive from their respective farms.

A farmer's labor income, as defined by farm management investigators and demonstrators, is what he has left of his gross farm income after he has paid his farm expenses out of it and had deducted from it a fair return of interest on his farm investment.

In calculating this labor income no account is made of the home which most farmers have on the farm, or of the vegetables, meat, milk, etc., which they derive from their farms. Farm management investigators and demonstrators, is a somewhat arbitrary factor by means of which they compare the efficiency of different farms. It can not be used to compare the business of a farmer with that of a city man whose home is entirely separated from his business.

Almost invariably it has been found very interesting and beneficial to individual farmers to help them calculate the labor incomes they are receiving from their farm business and then to analyze this business into its component parts and compare it item by item with averages of farms conducted by their neighbors who are working under conditions similar to their own. The following table shows

	Mr. A's farm.	Average age of the age 62 better farms.	Aver. Mr. B's.	
Labor income.....	\$1,131	\$1,050	\$145	\$72
Size of business:				
Total acres.....	282	188	171	100
Crop acres.....	284	144	125	70
Animal units.....	18	24	21	12
Quality of business:				
Live stock, returns on \$100 worth of feed.....	102	130	110	100
Crop yield:				
Corn—bushels.....	50	43	38	40
Oats—bushels.....	37	40	37	37
Hay—tons.....	1.3	1.6	1.6	1
Efficiency of labor:				
Crop acres per man.....	102	85	75	50
Crop acres per horse.....	37	22	18	12
Business diversity: Main source of income:				
Corn.....	\$880	\$813	\$615	\$390
Oats.....	584	304	240	—
Hogs.....	843	808	683	680
Cattle.....	556	526	350	375

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