

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

Outworn and weary, old and gray,
The helpless world in darkness lay;
And sins and sorrows, woe and crime,
Swart shadows of an iron time,
Shrouded life with a cheerless pall.
With death the hopeless end of all,
The prophet and the sage were dumb,
Seeing no hope nor comfort come.

But there shone a light in the East,
And the night was done;
And all were bid to the feast
Of hope begun,
When was born the victim and the priest,
In Mary's Son,
Then the seed of the ancient Writ
To harvest came;
The hand of a Child unknot
The web of shame,
An the fires of faith were lit
With his love-orbed name.

Through the quivering gulfs of tears
Still darkling flow;
Though winds of the storm-wexed years
Waft men to woe;
To the dim-seen mark the helmsman steers
By the beacon's glow.

Dear Child, whose heaven-lit eyes
Scan all man's ill!
With the hope that never dies
Prop our poor will,
And let thy sacrifice
Our spirits fill!

Though outcast at the rich man's gate,
The beggar Lazarus weep and wait;
Though want and woe and cruel things,
And many bitter sufferings
Deface this day of sacred mirth,
No hope that springs not from thy birth
May put the evil shapes to flight,
Cut down the wrong and build the right.

Though chill unfeath, though mists of doubt
May gird our brothers round about,
Let no foot fail, let no soul stray
Forever from the holy way,
Father, that wast e'er time began,
And brother of thy brother, man!

GRANDMOTHER'S STORY.

CHRISTMAS PARTY.

"Tell us a funny story this time."

Grandmother leaned back in her rocking-chair, looked into the faces of three or four grandchildren, who were sitting near her, and laughed outright. Then she put one soft, wrinkled white hand up over her eyes, rested her elbow on the arm of her chair, and laughed again.

"Oh! you have thought of one, I'm sure!"

"Yes,"

Her grandchildren, with their fathers and mothers, always spent Christmas at her home, and a story from her lips was usually a part of the programme for Christmas eve. And this was the story that was told in answer to their request, a year ago this Christmas.

"What I think I will tell you about took place about fifty-five years ago, when I was fourteen years old. I cannot say that I then saw anything funny in it. And if I didn't think it funny, I am sure the boy did not who took his part in the events of the evening.

"As I have said, I was fifteen years old, and Ebenezer Dill, who was a neighbor and acquaintance, was seventeen. We both went to the same school—a district school—and things in and around it were primitive enough. We lived about two miles from the school-house, and the Dill's farm joined my father's. I was the oldest child in our family. Ebenezer was the oldest of the Dill's children, and he and I were the only ones in either family who went to school that first winter.

"We often walked to and from school together. He was an awkward, bashful boy with a red head, who always seemed to be growing out of his clothes before they were half worn out, so that his pantaloons and the sleeves of his coat were generally several inches too short for him.

"I am sure, too, that I was awkward and bashful, and even at my best I never was a beauty, so possibly it would be about six-one and half-a-dozen of the other, if I should attempt to give a portrait of either of us.

"We had a lively, pleasant teacher that winter. Some of the folks said he was too full of fun for a school teacher, and that he should have more dignity. But in those days, as well as to-day, a teacher would be found fault with if he were made to order. This teacher's name was Hooper, and he prepared a tree, and had it placed in the school-house the day before Christmas. Some of the farmers grumbled about that, and said it took our minds off our book, and Mr. Hooper's mind from his duties as teacher, and it wasn't right. Nevertheless, we had the tree.

"Two or three days before Christmas, when I opened my spelling-book, I found, between the leaves, a little note scribbled in red ink on a piece of paper torn from a copy-book. It read like this:

"Miss PRISCILLA—Esteemed miss: I take my pen in hand to wish you a merry Christmas and to send you my best wishes, and to ask the pleasure of your society to the tree to be held here on Friday night. Hoping you will send me a writing that you will go with me, and that I may get it soon. I am your true friend and admirer,"

"EBENEZER B. DILL.

"P. S. My pen is bad, my ink is pale,

My love for you shall never fail."

"E. B. DILL.

"Round is the ring that has no end,

So is my love for you, my friend!"

"EBENEZER,"

"At the top of the page Ebenezer had drawn with blue and red ink a dove that looked like a gander, sitting on a tree that was not half as big as the bird. This is all as clear in my memory as though it had taken place yesterday.

"Although I walked home with Ebenezer that night, I did not say anything about the note, but the next day I slipped this into his arithmetic:

"MISTER EBENEZER B. DILL—Kind sir: Herein find my acceptance of your company on Friday night, as my folks are not coming, and I have no one else to come with, and I am much obliged for your wanting me to, and I will be ready at seven o'clock.

"MISS PRISCILLA H. FINK.

"P. S. I don't know any poetry, or I would put some in."

P. H. F.

"P. S. Our dog bit a man bad yesterday, so be careful, for he isn't chained nights."

"PRISCILLA."

"By seven o'clock on the next Friday evening I was ready to start for the school-house. My father was always full of fun, and was an awful tease. Of course, he made the most of this opportunity, and when Ebenezer knocked at the door he opened it and said,—

"Come in, Ebenezer! Come right in! Going to act as a bear to-night? Hey? Purty dark night for you to be out alone, ain't it? They say a bear see a bear in the woods to-day. Better look out. Jake Simpson says he saw tracks of some monst'rous big varmint in the frost this morning. Don't you let it eat up, my Prissy."

"Ebenezer answered quite promptly for him. 'I'll have to eat me first, sir.'

"My mother, who enjoyed any innocent pleasure, laughed, and asked,—

"Has your mother put anything on the tree for you?"

"I don't know," replied Eb.

"Well, I sent over a doll for Prissy and one for you, too, and a frosted cooky for each of you. Mind that you don't drop them if that wild creature out in the woods gets after you."

"Ebenezer blushed and moved nervously in his chair; but finally mustered up courage to say,—

"Well, I guess we'd better go, Miss Fink."

"That 'Miss Fink' amused father and mother very much, and we could hear them laughing after we got out into the road.

"Ebenezer was wonderfully fixed up. The hair oil was so thick on his head that it could be seen in white spots where it had hardened. Then he had on a white collar over his flannel shirt, and a green ribbon neck-tie run through a coral ring. His blue gingham handkerchief was odorous with cinnamon drops, and to crown the whole he had on his father's overcoat.

"I think we had gone half way to the school-house before either of us could think of a word to say. Then Ebenezer pulled his hand out of his pocket, and held it out toward me, saying only,—

"Here."

"He had given me a handful of candy hearts.

"There's readin' on 'em," he continued, after we had gone another half mile.

"Is they?" I answered hesitatingly.

"Yes, and its real purity, some of it."

"After that Ebenezer became less constrained and more confident.

"I know something," he whispered.

"Of course I was very much amazed at that, and responded, 'Do you?'

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Ebenezer emphatically.

"What is it?"

"Oh, nothing! Only there's going to be something on the tree for somebody."

"Of course I inferred that he meant me, but I didn't think it would be quite proper for me to say so."

"After a pause the young man exclaimed impulsively:

"You 'spect to get anything off the tree?"

"No."

"Well, you will, and I could tell who put it on that tree for you, if I had a mind to!"

"Could you?"

"Yas. And it cost seventy-five cents."

"Then there was silence. Time was given me to digest the important fact, and then he continued:

"I had seventy-five cents jest 'fore Christmas, but I ain't got it now, and I don't care if I ain't."

"Then I knew, of course, that he wished me to know that he had put seventy-five cent worth of something on the tree for me, and it seemed to me that the proper thing for me to do would be to place something on the tree for him. I was in a dilemma; but I remembered that I had in my pocket a pair of red and green suspenders with brass buckles, that I had made to put on the tree for my brother Cyrus, and now I concluded that the least I could do, in return for his generosity to me, was to put them on for Ebenezer. And acting on this conclusion, I packed them on the tree.

"The tree was beautiful, to our unaccustomed eyes, and the old school-house was full of people. Mr. Hooper, as each present was taken from the tree, read the name of the boy or girl to whom it was given. When my name was called, I marched up, and what do you think that awkward boy had put there for me? Why, a big china doll's head and a candy heart as big as a pie, with 'Be True to the Giver' on it in large gilt letters.

"My brother Cyrus knew that I had made the suspenders for him, and kept pointing at them as they dangled from the tree, saying to the boys around him,—

"Them's my sp'nders! Them red and green gallussses is going to be for me."

"You can imagine, therefore, what followed, when they were called off for 'Mister Ebenezer B. Dill.' Cyrus fairly screched in his indignation, and exclaimed,—

"Them gallusss aint for Eb Dill, neither."

"Of course there was a roar of laughter all over the school-room, and Cyrus began to cry. But Ebenezer kept the suspenders, and I actually had to give Cyrus a bite from my candy heart to keep him quiet.

"Well, when the presents had all been given, Eb and I left for home. He talked fast enough then, but about nothing but that doll's head and the heart, and how splendid they were."

"We had not gone very far when old Uncle Simon Sharpe overtook us. He was a singular old man, full of humor. I hardly think that Longfellow himself could make rhyme easier than Uncle Simon. His head was full of it, and they did say that he could say his prayers in poetry. He was in the best of spirits, and when he saw us, held his lantern up in our faces, and exclaimed,—

"Is this you, Priscilla Fink? Well, well,—

"It may in truth be said by some,

That Ebenezer bestrides you hum;

I blame you not to take a spark

To light you home when it is dark."

Then he gave Ebenezer a poke with his cane, and off he went ahead of us.

"We were nearly home, and were crossing our pasture, when I said, 'I wonder if there really are any bears in the woods.' For there were occasionally bears in those days, in the section of country in which we lived, and one in a great while a panther was killed.

"Well, you're all right if there are bears, but Eb, quite bravely. But just then something big and black jumped up from under an old apple tree that stood a little distance at our right. It stood still for a moment, but when we moved it jumped back.

"There is a bear!" exclaimed Ebenezer, and I could feel his arm tremble.

"The animal made another jump, and Ebenezer made a spring also, and actually got round the other side of me, so I was between him and the animal.

"I started and ran past the tree as fast as my feet would carry me toward home, leaving Ebenezer screaming behind. I was sure that the bear was eating him up.

"Reaching home, I burst into the house screaming, 'O father, father! Ebenezer! A bear! Under the old apple-tree in the pasture lot! and down I fell in a dead faint, with the candy heart and the doll's head broken to pieces within me.'

"Fat er and my older brothers took lanterns and guns, and started for the elm-tree as fast as they could run, while mother put me to bed.

"Don't tell us that poor Ebenezer was killed, even if he was a coward," cried one of grandmas' breathless listeners.

"Goodness, no!" laughed the old lady.

"When father and the boys got within twenty yards or so of the tree all was still, but the form of the animal could be dimly seen.

"You hold the lantern," said father, to brother Henry, "and I'll shoot the beast."

"But just as father was taking aim, he heard a voice 'Don't shoot, Mr. Fink. It ain't no bear. Please get me loose.'

"Father and the boys at once ran to the tree, and the next moment they were laughing so boisterously that mother heard them at the house.

"You see, we had a big, black calf about nine months old that had been kept in the stable lot, and that day father had moved a part of the fence so as to enlarge the lot. To keep the animal from running away, the hired man had taken a long rope and then tied up the animal to the tree out in the pasture.

"When Eb and I came along the calf jumped up, as badly scared as we, and then I ran, and Eb in his fright thought that the safest place for him was to climb the tree. As he was rushing for it, the calf started, tore round it in a circle, and before the frightened boy could get out of the way, that calf had wound a coil of rope around him, and it kept on running round and round until it had bound poor Ebenezer to the tree in three or four coils of rope.

"While he was trying to get out of the coils that were about him, father and the boys were on the ground, and before they were through

laughing, Eb had contrived to extricate himself.

"He said that when he felt the rope winding around him he thought it was a boa constrictor, and he was so pale that when the lantern was held to his face, the freckles showed like the spots on a turkey egg.

"And the boy was so angry because they laughed at him that he lay down on the ground and fairly bellowed, and I don't know but he was there when Santa Claus went his rounds that night. At any rate, after that I was never a favorite of his. The adventure and the laughter of the boys at his cowardice effectually cured his love-making."

On the Old Plantation.

"Bang, snap, fizz, bang!" When first I opened my eyes in the gray December dawn, I almost believed it to be Fourth of July, for surely it could be naught but firecrackers that were thus noisily saluting my ears. But as the cobwebs of sleep passed from my brain, I quickly recalled that this was my first Christmas in the "Sunny South," and I had been told that in some places it was a custom of the light-hearted Africans to welcome the day with the gay and festive Chinese crackers.

With considerable curiosity, then, I sprang from my couch and hurried to the window, to gaze down upon the courtyard below, where dozens of black and shining little "pickaninnes" were squabbling and turning over each other in a perfect frenzy of delight and occasionally being brought to order by a well-aimed cuff from some fat, good-natured "Mamie," who, however, seemed to enjoy the small fireworks as much as the youngest chocolate-shaved shaver there. Suddenly the master appeared, bowing and smiling, upon the broad veranda, when in an instant arose such a chorus of "Cris'mus gif, massa, Cris'mus gif!" as speedily brought a shower of small coins scattering among the crowd. Then what a frantic scrambling ensued, while for two hours later, the mistress of the household had her hands full, giving out extra rations of butter, sugar, tea and tobacco, to say nothing of gay bandannas, aprons, ribbons, and large gilt pins and earrings for the young and pretty girls.

The whole day, then, was one of feasting and jollification, the men, boys and dogs indulging in that rarest of sports to the true African, an exciting "possum hunt;" while in the evening the negro quarter was a scene of boisterous revelry, as old and young "tripped the light fantastic toe" to the squeaky strains of Uncle Jake's antique fiddle. Not till the night was far spent did the fun subside, and closed with a "cakewalk," when, in stiff and silent pairs, the dusky belles and beaux paraded by two by two, and in the end Maum Chloé proudly carried off the cake; for, in negro vernacular, "she never bat an eyelid, and wore a death-like look on her face," two peculiarities which the company evidently considered the height of grace and beauty. Certainly she was a "sight for gods or men," as with shoulders back, and arms akimbo, she marched with the air of a queen, and vainly conscious of her holiday finery, a low-necked gown, gorgeous bandanna, and glittering beads and ear-rings, which semi-barbaric splendor well accorded with her dark skin, like polished ebony. And as the midnight bells proclaimed that another Christmas was past and gone, the air resounded with hearty cheers, from many lusty throats, for "Ole massa, ole missus, and the ole plantation!"

SHE WOULDN'T KISS KRIS.

Last night I dreamed Old Christmas
Came knocking at the door;
I knew him by his long, white beard,
And by the furs he wore,

And by his coat with pock's
Stuffed full as they could hold;
He pinched my cheeks, he kissed me har
His lips were very cold!

He said, "I'm Grandpa Christmas
To all the girls and boys."

But, oh! he fairly shook the house—

His voice made such a noise!

Perhaps I hurt his feelings—