CHRISTMAS EVE IN A PALACE CAR

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WE were coming eastward on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé, the line peerless among American rail. road monopolies in the character of its service and evident care for the comfort of its passengers. I have sometimes wondered that other corporations, disturbed by strikes and given to zealous blacklisting of discharged employees, do not take time to inquire into the reason why this great New England system, with its thousands of miles of track spread like a network of steel over the great wheat fields of the Southwest, manages to command such loyal and devoted service from that magnificent body of men who compose its army of servitors. The secret is not hard to find to one who will mingle with its employees. He soon learns that these, from brakeman up to the Superintendent—and including the clerks of the chief officials—are treated like men and required to show themselves worthy of such treatment by displaying the same spirit towards the patrons of the road. Well paid, well provided, treated with gentlemanly consideration, they have developed an esprit de corps which of itself tends to eliminate unworthy elements and has produced a body of subordinate officials unequalled by any which has chanced to fall under my observation. I have made such things a study, and there is hardly a road in the United States upon which I have not had abundant opportunity for pursuing such investigation. Good wages, convenient runs, neat lodging-houses, hospitals for the sick and consideration for the disabled, with rigid discipline and courteous example are at the bottom of this notable result. Courtesy and faithfulness is the rule of the road, and should be engraved on its corporate seal. A bulldozing conductor, an insolent brakeman or a sullen engineer I never yet saw upon the track. It is characterized by the anxious carefulness of the Boston business man, who will stop in the busiest hour of the day to mark out the strange wayfarer's course along her crooked streets, modified and broadened by the heartiness and insouciance of the great West. It is said to be grasping and relentless in the assertion of power, keen to take advantage of opportunity and a firm believer in the underlying dogma of the railway monopolist, that the tariff rates should be governed by consideration of how much the shipper's business will stand; but these are common infirmities, while its virtues are rare enough to deserve grateful remembrance from those whose comfort they have enhanced. I did not mean to write this, but somehow the time and place where I heard it have become an essential part of the curious tale I set out to relate.

We were speeding eastward, as I said, across the plains. We had watched the sun drop down behind the mountains, lighting with his farewell glow the snowy crests long after the plains were covered with gray shadows. Then the stars came out, and the feeling of isolation which the dull, unbroken distance and the great unclouded vault closing evenly down on every side produces crept over us and we drew away from the windows to escape its curious irksomeness. It was Christmas Eve, and a little company, strangers to each other a few hours before, but drawn together by that very sense of isolation which the desert brings, gathered in the smoking saloon. With the freedom which characterizes the great West we were soon acquainted, and the conversation naturally turned upon the season and the personal experience of the various individuals connected with the Christmas time. There were representatives of almost every part of the country, together with some whose memories held quaint pictures of the season of good will in other lands. They were tales of homes and friends and quaint adventure. There were few silences, for each one's story seemed to awaken an echo in every other mind, and that one who chanced first to begin went on with a new episode of the universal epic.

I must confess that the stories were not many of them of the character of those which have become known in our literature as "Christmas Stories." I do not remember now that there were any acts of notable benevolence recounted, but there were many quaint incidents and some serious adventures. Curiously enough there was no boasting. One told how he had gone a long way, when an awkward lad, to carry a Christmas present to his boy love. She was the daughter of rich parents, and his heart beat furiously at the thought of his presumption, but he trudged on only to find the windows of her father's house all aglow and a gay company gathered within. When he mustered courage to ring the bell and ask for her he was bidden to wait in the hall, where she came to him in the dazzling radiance of her party attire, and, when he stated his errand, stood smiling upon him, a very angel as he thought, while he sought in every pocket for the gift which was the result of months of self-denial. It was gone. He had lost it on the way, but dare not confess the fact. After vain searching he looked at her in blank despair, only to see that she divined his misfortune and pitied his distress.

"Never mind," she said, putting her little gloved hand on his rough sleeve and glancing quickly towards the closed door, "never mind, some other time will do."

She was leaning towards him; her rosy lips were in easy reach; he thought there was no time like the present, and kissed them twice before they could be withdrawn. His audacity had its reward, and when he drew from his pocket the likeness of a beautiful woman and passed it around with the simple words, "My, wife, gentlemen," none of us wondered that Christmas Eve brought back to him the memory of the gift he lost and the treasure he found that night.

One of the party had been lost in a storm—an Australian blizzard—on a Christmas Eve, and blinded with the wind and numb with cold had staggered on, thinking he heard the bells of his English home pealing the Christmas chimes, to find himself when the morning came in a sheepfold, saved by the warmth of the innocent creatures who had crowded about him to shelter themselves.

There were some curious stories of the supernatural, but the one that impressed me most was told by a quiet, commonplace looking man who had been up to that time a silent listener. It was getting late, and the porter had more than once intimated that the rules of the Pullman Car Company required him to put out the light in the saloon, and finding it impossible to effect our dislodgment, had relapsed into a contented auditor. His eyes were still distended at the ghostly narrative we had just heard, when the gentleman I have alluded to said in a tone of positive conviction:

"Well, gentlemen, you may say what you like, but I, for one, firmly believe that on Christmas Eve we poor mortals are allowed to come nearer to the Infinite than on any other time."

"Bless God!" said the porter, "I don't want to come no nearer. I'e nigh enuff, I is."

"Well," said the gentleman whose remark had provoked this sally, when the laugh that followed it had subsided, "it may surprise you to have me say so, but I am satisfied that all these stories and traditions of supernatural occurrances on that one night of the year are not altogether without foundation. I am not particularly religious, though I always wish I were about Christmas time, and do not think I am inclined to be superstitious. I have no skill in story-telling, but if you will allow me to relate a little incident, I think you will confess that I am not exactly without reason for the belief that I have expressed."

There was a universal murmur of assent. Cigars were relighted, and every one settled himself to hear the stranger's narrative.

"'Fore God," said the porter, who was peering in over the heads of those who sat about the door, "I'se gwine ter git away from heah. I don't want ter heah enny mo' ghos' stories dis Chris'mus, no how."

We laughed again as he darted along the passage towards the front of the car. As I was seated on the side next to this passage I soon heard him stealing back, and before the narrator was well started in his story I caught sight of the dusky face peering cautiously in at the door.

"In the winter of 1862," the gentleman began, "I was one of the line officers of a volunteer regiment in the Army of the Cumberland. The army was lying about Nashville, Tenn., with Bragg some thirty miles away at Murfreesboro. About the 20th of that month our outposts had been pushed forward on the road to Murfreesboro, the right and left a little refused and our rear protected by the Cumberland River. It was pretty generally understood that there would be a fight or a foot-race in the neighborhood of Tullahoma, where the Confederates held a strong position, which was supposed to be well fortified, as, indeed, it would have been had Gen. Bragg learned the lesson he was taught soon after a little earlier. We were about in the centre, and those of us who had gotten over the idea that warfare was a holiday business, as most of us had, for our division was on the left at Perryville and was roughly handled there, were beginning to forecast our part in the coming conflict with something like trepidation. On that day I was unexpectedly called upon to act as Assistant Adjutant-General on the staff of the Colonel commanding the brigade, and the next day we received orders to be ready to march without baggage, except two tents for the brigade headquarters. Where we were to go we had no idea—that is the troops had not—the Colonel commanding and his A. A. G. being the only ones intrusted with that knowledge. In the early morning we passed through the silent camp to the sleeping city, crossed the river and by sunrise had made a good half-day's march to the southeastward. The Colonel was proud of the locomotive power of his men and never missed an opportunity to display it. It had snowed all the morning, and what with the cold and the snow and the uncertainty in regard to their destination, the soldiers were in that most unpleasant of all conditions of mind, a mixture of apprehension and discomfort.

"'Where were we going?' was the universal query. Of course, I pleaded ignorance. The Colonel refused to give information, and nobody else knew.

"As we bore steadily to the northward opinions varied as to whether we were sent in pursuit of Morgan, who was threatening our communication, or were to turn the right flank of the enemy. After a little the route became rough and our course changed to different points of the compass so often that the speculation upon the subject at length ceased. The enemy seemed to have been in a like quandary respecting our movements, which we suppose was exactly what our commanding General desired.

"On the afternoon of the 23d, after one of the pleasantest marches a body of troops ever made, though the weather was cold and we had to wade streams where the ice had to be broken, we reached our first halting-place—the banks of a little stream known as Bedsoe's Creek. I was to learn years afterwards the romance which gave it that designation. That day the weather had moderated, the light fall of snow had disappeared and the 24th dawned, as balmy and beautiful a day as a Southern winter sun ever shone upon. Our orders were to remain here until the afternoon of Christmas. We were camped in a splendid position, for the Colonel, though he had been in the service but six months, was a born soldier, and if somewhat reckless in undertaking difficulty was alert and watchful as a lynx.

"Of course, marching in light order, our rations were not over-abundant, nor our bill of fare as varied as it might have been. The old fields about the bivouac were full of game, rabbits and quail. The men used every device to catch the former whenever they could be started within the guard lines, but not with much success. The near approach of Christmas awakened a relish for luxuries as well as softened the hearts of those in authority. On the suggestion of the Quartermaster, it was decided by the Colonel to give the boys a rabbit hunt.

"I am something of a sportsman, but I must confess that anything like that hunt I have never seen before or since. The regiments were marched out to regular positions selected by the commander and marked by the guides on the sides of various old fields where the sedge-grass grew waist high. These were intersected by small streams over which the alders grew dense and dark. Here they stacked arms. The wood and roads were picketed and a guard was set over the guns. The field officers remained mounted, and one in each regiment was required to remain with the arms. Then each man was directed to cut a good stout club, and thus equipped returned to the ranks. Thus far all was mystery to the men. When the companies were reformed each regiment formed a hollow square in single file so as to inclose as much space as possible. Then the order 'Inward face!' was given, and the four sides began to close in upon the centre. One universal shout of laughter went up from the men as they comprehended the character of the movement. Then every one addressed himself to the sport. It seemed as if every square yard of sedge grass hid a rabbit, and as the lines closed in on each other the medley of staring eyes, flapping ears, cotton tails and sticks and stones thrown by the men was ludicrous. When one field was exhausted the same tactics was pursued with another. The sport was boisterous and exciting. Everybody joined in it except those detailed to keep watch, and when we marched back to our bivouac laden with rabbits, persimmons and mistletoe I never saw a more jubilant and rollicking set of men. Booths of evergreen and mistletoe were made, the game cooked and eaten, we took our Christmas dinner in advance—for the soldier never gives credit to to-morrow for what may be enjoyed to-day. The jollification lasted well into the night and in one of the brigade headquarter tents a jug of peach brandy and a can of honey which some one had been shrewd enough to purchase at a farm-house we had passed the day before, enabled us to drink the health of absent loved ones in really enjoyable tipple."

A loud smack interrupted the speaker at this point, and looking towards the door of the saloon all were convulsed at the curious contortions of the porter, who was going through the manual of fasting and swallowing in a way to show that peach-and-honey was no stranger to his gustatory organs.

"La, Marse Captiug," he said, with a military salute. "nebber 'spected to heah 'bout dem times out hear on dis railroad. Thought I knowed yer face tho,' at the berry fust."

"What's that? Were you there too, John?" asked the brown-bearded man in pleased surprise; for after all, old comradship takes small account of color.

"Wal, not adzackly dar, but I warz tharabouts," said the porter, showing his teeth.

"Where?"

"Wal, sir, I war jest ober de odder side ob dat big swamp wid a crowd ob Mars John Morg'in's raiders, sah. An' when you was got ter currin' on so, day jes' 'lowed dat wor de berry time ter go in un' stampede de whole lot. Dey wasn't enuff on 'em, yer see, ter fite. But dey tuk an' sent out some scouts dat crep up clus an' spy out de lan', yer kno', an' 'fore God dey cum back, dey did, an' said dem damn Yankees wan't drunk at all, but war jest lettin' on ter git our folks ter pitch in, don't yer kno? Dey said dey had der gyards all out an' war jes' cold sober singing Chris'mas hymns an' psalm tchunes ez if ther war a big meetin' gwine on thar. So our folks—de Confederates, yer kno'—dey thout hit war best ter git up and git outer dar an' let Marse Morgin kno' all 'bout it, yer kno'. But I wasn't able ter march myself dat night. Leastways I got lost in dat dar swamp, an' nex' mornin' blundered inter de camp an' got tuk pris'ner, I did. So I 'cluded ter change sides, an' been wukkin' fer myself ebber since. Dat was de sort ob Chris'mas fer me. Marse Cap'n—sho'ly was."

"But I never heard of that before," said the Captain in surprise.

"'Spect not," said the porter with a shrug. "Hit all so, do', an' I went back to Nashville with you uns, an' stayed dar till mos' de s'render, an' den come Norf."

"Why didn't you tell us apout those rebs?"

"Wal, ye see, in de fus' place nobody ax me, an' in ne nex' place, I been roun' dese camps long nuff to know dat de best ting a nigger do on either side was t'jes keep his mouf shut jez ez much ez he could. Dat's de way I did."

The porter's philosophy was greeted with a round of approving laughter, after which the Captain, as I shall call him hereafter, who had gained confidence by this interruption and confirmation of his narrative, continued:

"Well, gentlemen, I suppose you think I am a good while coming to the point of my story, but I will not detain you much longer. It happened that there was in our regiment, the —— Indiana, a Lieutenant who for no special reason was a kind of butt for the sport of all the line officers. His name was Bridges—a provocation to ridicule in itself. He was a good fellow in his way, but his way was not a popular one. He was not far from forty years of age, rather below the medium height, with a squeaky voice and fussy manner—not a bit of dignity nor power of command in him. He was quite well educated, however, and was a successful man of business in the little town where he lived. He had married a young wife just before the regiment left for the field, and I think the inclination to talk about her was the chief reason of our combining to make fun of him. He knew he was being laughed at, but kept on doing his duty fairly well—very well, I should say, under the circumstances. He was no coward, but his young wife made him wish to live, and caused him to be more careful of his health and safety, I think, than he otherwise would have been. He had taken a sort of fancy to me, thinking, perhaps, that I did not take part in the general mirth at his expense. I am afraid he was mistaken. Besides that, the Second Lieutenant of his company was a great friend of mine, and I was anxious to see a bar on his shoulder straps. I should say that I was probably the only man in the command who was familiar with the appearance and location of the little Kentucky town which was our real destination. It was hoped that we would reach it about daylight of the 26th and defeat or perhaps capture a force of the enemy supposed to be stationed there. The Colonel was ambitious, and would spare no effort.

"After our little carousal—which was not extensive enough to produce any unpleasant results—I looked over matters to see if I had forgotten any duty and turned in on a bed of cedar boughs, with a saddle for a pillow. I was awakened by some one shaking me and calling my name in excited tones. I was on my feet in an instant and rushed to the opening in the tent to see what was the matter. It was a beautiful night—the moon nearly at the full, the air crisp, cool and clear, the camp silent save for the tread of the sentincls and the occasional pawing of the horses picketed in their places. The camp-fires were burning low and I could see the rows of men sleeping on their arms near their impromptu Christmas decorations.

HE CAME OUT INTO THE MOONLIGHT.

"What's the matter, Bridges?" I asked impatiently. He came out into the moonlight and I could see that his face was pinched and drawn with agony. He looked ten years older than when I bade him goodnight a few hours before. I was really alarmed, and asked anxiously if he were ill.

"'Oh, I am well enough,' he answered with more composure than I had given him credit for, 'but I have had such a horrible dream—no, not a dream, a vision.'

"How I kept from laughing in his face I do not know. But indeed his agony was pitiful and I felt almost awed by it. At least I felt a sort of sympathy for him, though indeed it was an odd idea that a soldier should stand there in the moonlight, his face showing pale through the fingers clasped over it, and his voice husky with excitement, because he had had a bad dream. I remember thinking that many of the poor fellows wrapped in their blankets there might very well have troubled visions if they were clairvoyant in their sleep. However, I mastered the inclination both to laugh and to sneer, and opening a little flask of brandy which I kept for special occasions, I poured some into a tin cup, and holding it to his lips told him to drink. His teeth fairly chattered as he drank it off. I gave him a camp-stool, took another myself and waited for him to recover his equanimity. After a while he said:

"'You are very kind, Lieutenant. It is silly no doubt. I don't know how I came to be so affected. I don't believe I am a coward, but it was so real—so terribly real. I wouldn't mind it myself—I really would not," he repeated protestingly. 'I don't wish to die, but I would never think of being troubled about it in this way, if it was not for my wife. You don't know her, Lieutenant. It would kill her. You don't know how her life is bound up in mine. It's not any common case. I've been father and lover and husband and savior—all to the poor girl; took her out of the street—no, not out of the street, out of the very shadow of death, when she was but a child, reared, educated and loved her all the time with the double love of father and husband. I would never have married her though—never, if she had not insisted upon it before I came away. She was sure I would be hurt—killed perhaps, and she wanted to be as near to me as she could come. I knew it was foolish. I ought not to have married her. Why, she's only seventeen and I'm forty—a graybeard, too. That's what the boys call me sometimes, and they are right. I was not worthy of her—never can be, but I love her, and she worships me. It would make you ashamed if you could see her letters to me. I am the pinnacle of the world's life and worth in her eyes. I know I don't deserve it, and I ought not to have let her get such a foolish idea. In truth, I did nothing to encourage it—but—but I loved her, and I could not dispel her illusion—could I, now?'

"'But what has this to do with your dream, man?'

"'Ah, yes—my dream,' cried he with a shudder. 'Well, it wasn't a dream, you see, at all, for I wasn't asleep. I had been lying down looking up at the stars and thinking of Emily—wondering how she was getting on, you know, and fearing she was unhappy. The truth is, I don't think of much else. I'm an old fool, I suppose, but I simply can't help it. Remember, I've carried her in my heart ever since she was four years old, Lieutenant, and it has been the one joy of my life to think and do for her. I'm not a coward nor neglectful of my duty, but how can I help it if her image is before my eyes all the time? Well, I grew so anxious about her that I got up and sat by the fire with my back against the stump of a sapling the boys had cut down for wood. Presently, while I sat there looking at the fire and at the shadows in the woods in front of our camp it all disappeared, and instead of it I saw a town perched on the side of a hill, with a wide street that ran down to a river which swept around the whole so that the town stood on a promontory jutting out into the river, which was crossed by a railroad bridge below the town, while the hill that rose above it had a pine grove and some sort of an earthwork running along its crest.'

"'Did you ever see the place before?' I asked in surprise. I was sure he had not.

"'That's one of the queer things about it,' he answered. 'I am sure I never saw such a place before, and yet I seemed to know every foot of the ground. There had been a battle there. I knew that—I don't know how—we had been in possession of the railroad—the enemy had driven us back through the town and fired the bridge. We made a stand here and there. It don't seem as if it was our men exactly, and yet it must have been,' he said simply. 'I wouldn't have been fighting with any other force, would I?'

"'You wouldn't be likely to be,' I said, 'though, of course, that is possible.'

"'Yes, of course,' he assented. 'Well, as I said, there were some graves along the side of the hill just below the edge of the pines and inside the line of works. By the way, there was a fort or something of that kind on the point above the town. I seemed to be looking on at all this,' said he. 'There were no soldiers and no camps around, but just those red graves on the hillside with rough headboards at each. Everything was just as still and quiet as death. The sun was shining brightly and the grass was fresh and green as it is in the early spring sometimes.

"'While I was wondering at this I saw a woman standing at one of the graves. She was bowed and her back was towards me, you see, but I knew it was Emily and knew she was alone in the world. Somehow, I was not surprised, but I wondered where I was and why she was wearing a widow's weeds.'

"'All at once she looked back over her shoulder, pressed her hand to her heart, and I saw that her eyes were wild—crazed with much suffering. I knew that in an instant, but did not seem to understand it until I read the headboard which she disclosed as she turned around. It read:

J. S. Bridges,
Lieut. —Ind. Vols.
Killed in action at
——ville, Ky.
26th of Dec., 186—.

"'I did not get the date, because her figure hid a part of the inscription from me. I saw enough though. I knew I had been killed in battle and that Emily was crazed with grief at her bereavement. Remember, I did not dream this, but *saw* it. I know the vision will be fulfilled, too. I don't mind about myself. I didn't then. I didn't mind having died. I think I was rather glad to be dead, except for Emily—I couldn't bear that she should suffer—that her young life should be destroyed, her brain crazed with sorrow!'

"'My God, Bridges,' said I, 'how did you learn where we are going?'

"'Where we are going?' he asked in surprise.

"'Yes, indeed, you have described with the utmost minuteness the place we are expected to reach and attack on the morning of the 26th—the day after to-morrow—at daybreak."

"The words were out of my mouth before I realized that I had betrayed the secret of the expedition. I knew it was safe enough with Bridges, but I was mortified that I should, even for a moment, have forgotten my trust.

"The poor fellow's face became a shade paler, I thought, but he did not show any further sign of fear."

"'Well," he said, quietly enough, after a moment's silence, 'I knew it was my fate, though I had no idea we were going to turn off our course and strike towards Mumfordsville.'

"'And who said we were?' I asked, anxious to regain the ground lost by my previous hasty answer.

"'That is the name I saw on the headboard,' he answered. 'Poor Emily!' he added, with a sigh.

"I confessed that was our destination, but tried to cheer him up by telling him there was little likelihood of a fight, and if there should be one little chance that he would be in it. I even offered to have him detailed for special service to keep him out of the thickest of it. He shook his head.

"'I couldn't do it,' he said. 'Besides it would do no good. One can't avoid what is decreed.'

"I trembled as I saw how thoroughly he was possessed of that fatalistic idea I had known so many soldiers to entertain, and which I had never known to fail in its forecasting of the end. I was no longer inclined to laugh at him. His querulousness had departed and he was dead to all thought of himself as if the stroke of fate had already fallen. He only repeated his wife's name softly.

"'Poor Emily! Poor Emily!'

"He told me he had made his will and named me one of his executors. His wife was the sole heir and also executrix. He did not suppose I could act now—he had not looked for the end quite so soon—but he wanted me associated with her. If I could, he hoped I would counsel and assist her.

"'Poor Emily!' he said. 'She is but a child and she will not be as well off as many think. I spent a good deal of money raising the regiment. I did not think of going in it then. I thought that was the part that I could do and was glad to do. I shouldn't have come at all, but Emily got the notion that I was going to do so and talked about it so that I saw it would gratify her pride. So I came. I don't think I was intended for a soldier, though I am willing to do what I can. If they had made a quartermaster now—that is in my line. But I was not going to lobby for it, and besides I don't think Emily would have liked it as well.'

"All this talk in his quiet, pathetic voice was too much for me. The idea of being an executor too was only less terrible to me than of being an executioner. I was only just twenty-two, a stranger to such things and having an unusual dread of all legal complexities. I knew nothing of Bridges's business, living as I did in a distant part of the county, had never seen his wife but once, when she came to bid him good-by as we started for the field. She was a beautiful woman. I wondered then how she came to marry Bridges. I understood now. I was very diffident at that time and, like most country lads, shy of ladies' society. The very idea of being associated with a pretty widow in the administration of her husband's estate threw me into a perspiration. I think I had an idea that there was no way out of such a duty if it were once devolved on me. So I begged him to excuse me, but to no purpose. He said his wife had the will and he would rest easier if he knew I was interested in her welfare. Why he should I could not imagine. I was nothing but a schoolboy and not a very bright one either.

"In trying to find a way out of this it occurred to me that an officer with a little detail of men was to be sent back in the morning. I urged him to take this, but he declined. Determined to get out of what seemed to me a desperate scrape, I finally asked him outright why he did not resign, take this detail back to the city and leave the service. I thought I might help my friend Edson by persuading him to this course as well as save the man's life and benefit the service at the same time. I did not hesitate to tell Bridges what he already knew, that he was not fitted for his place, and it would be a patriotic duty on his part.

"He hesitated chiefly I am sure on account of his wife. At the same time his love for her and the conviction he had of her helplessness inclined him to follow my counsel. The result was that before sunrise his resignation was made out, approved by the Colonel and he was on his way back to Nashville in command of the squad detailed to take in a few sick, some wagons and despatches. A week afterwards he was relieved from duty and went back to private life."

"Did you have a hard fight at Mumfordsville?" asked one of the listeners.

"We carried it by assault at daybreak of the 26th," said the Captain, with a smile, "without firing a shot or losing a man, capturing one mule very far gone with the glanders, which was all the trace the enemy had left, they having departed twelve hours before we arrived."

"So he wouldn't have been hurt after all," said one.

"He must have thought that vision of his was a tremendous sell," said another.

"Poor Emily!" exclaimed another, in lugubrious tones.

This sally brought the laugh that the quaint ending of the narrative seemed to deserve, and there was a movement to retire, when, curious to know the feeling of the man after this ludicrous anti-climax, I asked:

"What ever became of the fellow?"

"That is the strangest part of the matter, gentlemen," said the Captain soberly. He had not joined in the laugh, and every one settled back in his place to wait for the sequel. "In February, 1864, I was ordered home on recruiting service. The train was delayed at Mumfordsville for repairs to the track, which had lately been disturbed by bushwackers. Hearing that we were likely to be delayed all day, I strolled into the little town and remembering Bridges's dream after a time, sauntered up to the crest of the hill where he had read his doom. As I did so I could but remember how accurately he had described what he had never seen. Queer

SHE TURNED A WILD, STARTLED LOOK UPON ME.

enough there were even some fresh graves on the crest where he had located his own. As I came nearer I saw a woman in widow's weeds kneeling by one of them. I do not know why, but my curiosity was piqued to see her face and I drew near at the risk of intruding on her grief. I was within a few yards when the noise of my footsteps came to her ears and she turned a wild, startled look upon me, and cast herself prone upon the grave, clasping the head board wildly and protesting vehemently against being removed. As she did so, I saw the head board previously concealed by her form. On it was distinctly traced:

J. S. Bridges.
Lieut., —Ind. Vols.
Killed in action at Mumfordsville,
Ky., Dec. 26, 1863.

Every one drew a long breath at this announcement.

"And the woman?" asked one.

"His wife. She had come for his body and had become insane with grief. A family in the town had kindly cared for her."

"How did it come about?"

"Well, the story of his resignation leaked out and the ludicrousness of the subsequent events was too much for the people at home. He was jeered and taunted until even his young wife hung her head in shame at the thought of having married a coward. Bridges stood it for a while, then went and joined a regiment which was being recruited in the next county as a private. In a fight which occurred just after it was mustered into service he showed such desperate valor and withal such soldierly capacity that he was promoted to his former rank, to date from that day. By mere accident he was at Mumfordsville when Morgan made his attack on the garrison demoralized by their Christmas festivities, and in trying to rally the troops in the early morning was killed on the very spot he had described so well a year before."

Nobody spoke for some minutes. Then one, interpreting the look in all our eyes, shrugged his shoulders and said: "Strange, wasn't it?"

I was thinking of the young wife, and almost involuntarily asked:

"And the wife?"

"She was so overcome with remorse at this catastrophe, which she blamed herself for having caused, that, as I said, she became insane. I took her home, secured proper care for her, qualified as executor of her husband's will and when my recruiting leave expired tendered my resignation and wound up his estate. It was at some personal sacrifice that I did so, for I had been promoted in the mean time and a pair of eagles were waiting my acceptance of the commission. I thought it my duty to repair the harm I seemed unintentionally to have been instrumental in causing."

"Did she recover?" asked one, with the sympathy we all felt in his voice.

"She is my wife," said the Captain, and his lip quivered as he added, "I dread to be away from her at this season. Instead of being a time of hilarity it is always one of apprehension to me. But for an accident to a train I should have been at home last night. As it is I am trying to divert her attention from the past by frequent despatches showing my progress homeward. I hope it may not be in vain. Pardon me, gentlemen, if I have marred your pleasure. Christmas is not always a synonym for pleasant memories."

The whistle sounded as he ceased speaking.

"There is Dodge City," he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "I must send a despatch from here so that she will get it early in the morning."

A Christmas Story, by Bill Nye. See The Sunday WORLD. *Three cents.*

Apropos of New Year Resolutions.

[*From Harper's Bazar.*]

It is so easy to be good next week or the week after, because that person who is going to be good next week or the week after is another individual, the person of that time another person, not one's self, not the person of this time. It is so difficult to say: Now, now, now is the time to leave off! because the person whom "Now" addresses is one's self, and experiences the whole bitterness of the renunciation. And for this reason we may outgrive that usually the time for carrying the good resolve into effect is seldom this moment or this day, but is always among the to-morrows; and thus uncounted good resolutions are made in any part of the last year, the time for their budding into action being always left for the first day of the new year.

A Faithful Wife.

[*From the Chicago Tribune.*]

"I shall use the $25 you gave me to spend for Christmas, John," said the wife, tenderly, to the young man who had recently become the partner of her joys and sharer of her sorrows, "in the purchase of something that will constantly remind me of your generosity. I shall have the portraits of my first three husbands beautifully framed and hung in our sitting-room."

John looked at the ceiling with a rapt, dreamy gaze, and in the deep, eloquent silence that ensued the wallpaper could be distinctly heard adhering to the wall.

A Powerful Agent.

[*From the Binghamton Republican.*]

"Too much water," says an authority on the subject, will remove the strongest growth of hair." True, every word of it. Water will in time destroy even the locks of a canal.

Only a Small Percentage.

[*From the St. Paul Pioneer Press.*]

There are in existence 180,000 copies of "the letter that never came." Any married woman knows that this is a small proportion of those that were never mailed.

Ribes's Compound Dandelion Pills
are
the best LIVER PILLS you can take. No Mercury, no Aloes, no Jalap. Box 100 pills), 15c. *.*

A SAFE, sure cure for coughs and colds, ADAMSON'S BOTANIC BALSAM. EINSMAN, 20th st., 4th ave. *.*

CHRISTMAS IN THE HOSPITAL.

BY A PAUPER INMATE.

Merry Christmas! Here?

Hold down, with prostrate, aching body, for many weary months, a bed sack in a hospital for the destitute, until, with spinal column worn away, your department of the interior in utter disorganization; the knots of matted straw are grinding away at the under side of your breast-bone, and, of course, you're "merry!"

In this yet dim light of early Christmas-morn, see that ghost of fever and famine combined stretched on the next cot; eyes glazed, claw-fingers picking at the torn blankets. A merry sight, isn't it? Grim Death chuckles; it's his meat.

Listen to that fellow on the opposite bed in a strait-jacket, raving prayers and curses. A smashed skull, strychnine and whiskey make him merry.

See "Little Billy," all warped and twisted. He goes to the Alms house next week; no place else on earth for him. A merry thought in his Christmas turkey, eh?

Dry bread and slop coffee breakfast; then the doctors. Sawbones, sr., is a pleasant man. He does his best for a fellow. Sawbones, jr., mental weight six ounces to the pound, wears eyeglasses, pimples, Waterbury watch and an air of supernatural wisdom. He has calculated on making his first post-mortem on your cadaver and highly disapproves of your presumption in still living. The patients are dosed liberally and experimentally in the interests of science and education. Sucking surgeons and 'prentice barbers must practise on somebody, you know.

It's cold in the ward—cold with the zero frigidity of proverbial charity, and you snuggle under the bed covers, while those patients out and about shuffle around and try to warm up by exercise. A jolly crowd this.

Visitors arrive; wives looking as ill and even more miserable than the men whom they visit; babies in arms of course, and often a tottering chick hanging to the skirts. These make lively family parties, awfully lively. The shadow of unpaid rent enlivens them.

"Chipper" young girls come to see "the old man" or some "feller." These are high-hatted, bedecked with cheap gauds and profuse of fluffy bangs; but their footwear and general rig are as dilapidated as Jake Sharp's reputation. They chew gum and munch candy, and are gay with the giggles of semi-idiocy. Tough lads are here also, in a degree subdued by the restrictions against loudness, profanity and indiscriminate distribution of tobacco-juice. They "don't see no Christmas racket 'bout here."

There is one dear, pale, white-haired little woman, with a smile that makes your heart sick. She hurries to a cot in the corner. "Pappy" is there, her long-afflicted, patient husband, whom she loves to-day with the same proud tenderness that filled her heart long ago, when both were young and strong and happy. "Pappy" was rich once, and she had diamonds and carriages. Well, the bank cashier has the wealth now in Canada. The frail wife tries to wear a Christmas face, tries to joke a little, and from her pocket brings a few little dainties which she starved herself to buy for him, and he makes a brave effort to be bright once more. But soon they are silent; hand in hand they remain in the quiet of content or despair. If God in his mercy would this moment call these twin souls into the world beyond, surely then theirs would be a Merry Christmas.

But its dinner-time; now for the feast. Outsiders must get outside. Two big kettles are carried in, the turkey has been roasted by stewing, and it is carved and served with a big tin dipper. These are a peculiar breed of turkeys; thirty-eight men are furnished, yet no part of turkey anatomy appears save wings and legs. This is a peculiarity of charity turkeys. But there is plenty to satisfy those who eat and those who gorge, and no atom is left. In a week or two, may be, you'll see to-morrow's paper with a list of the many good things provided for your feast. You'll see all you didn't get—in the paper.

Of course there has been praying and sermonizing, but pudding and sauce would have caught on better; and there are other incidents, but in the riotous festivities of the day how can one recall all?

The dishes are washed, the floor swept; the nurse comes in and serves pills or concoctions all around as a relish; and then the fight against cold, and the growling and the misery, the sickness of body, mind and soul, that is the lot of every common day, take possession of each, and Christmas—for the pauper patient—is over.

Favorite Books of Popular Preachers. See the Sunday WORLD. *Three cents.*

Crumpled Rose Leaves.

[*From Puck.*]

Dry Goods Clerk (to fellow clerk)—Timmy, you remember I told you of a desperate flirtation I had with a beautiful girl at Saratoga, when I was on my vacation?

Timmy—Yes, chappie.

Dry Goods Clerk—She was in here to-day, and bought some dress goods.

Timmy—What did she have to say?

Dry Goods Clerk—She asked me if the goods would wash; that's all.

Cold Waves

Are predicted with reliable accuracy and people liable to the pains and aches of rheumatism dread every change to damp or stormy weather. Although we do not claim Hood's Sarsaparilla to be a positive specific for rheumatism, the remarkable cures it has effected show that it may be taken for rheumatism with reasonable certainty of benefit. Its action in neutralizing the acidity of the blood, which is the cause of rheumatism, constitutes the secret of the success of Hood's Sarsaparilla in curing this complaint. If you suffer from rheumatism, give Hood's Sarsaparilla a fair trial; we believe it will do you good.

"I suffered a long time with rheumatism in my left arm and shoulder, my blood being in a very low condition. I was advised to use Hood's Sarsaparilla, and I did so with great success. Since I have been taking it I have not been troubled with rheumatism, and my blood is in a better condition." MRS. M. MOUNT, 303 Nostrand avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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100 Doses One Dollar

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especially devoted to Ladies and Children.

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THIS (SATURDAY) EVENING, AT 8 O'CLOCK,
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Under the management of Frank W. Sanger,
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By Steele Mackaye.
HOLIDAY MATINEES, Dec. 26 & Jan. 2.
Seats now on sale.

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Evenings at 8.15. Matinee Saturday at 2.15.
FORGET-ME-NOT.
Characters by Messrs. Osmond Tearle, Harry Edwards, J. W. Pigott, Mms. Ponisi, Miss Nettie Guion and Miss Rose Coghlan. CHRISTMAS MATINEE Dec. 26.
. In Preparation a New Comedy Entitled
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SEATS NOW ON SALE
For the engagement of
EDWIN BOOTH AND LAWRENCE BARRETT.
"JULIUS CÆSAR," MONDAY, DEC. 26.

A CHILD'S LIFE SAVED

When six months old the left hand of our little grandchild began to swell and had every appearance of a large boil. We poulticed it, but all to no purpose. About five months after it became a running sore. Soon other sores formed. He then had two of them on each hand, and as his blood became more and more impure it took less time for them to break out. A sore came on the chin, beneath the under lip, which was very offensive. His head was one solid scab, discharging a great deal. This was his condition at twenty-two months old, when I undertook the care of him, his mother having died when he was a little more than a year old, of consumption (scrofula of course). He could walk a little, but could not get up if he fell down, and could not move when in bed, having no use of his hands. I immediately commenced with the CUTICURA REMEDIES, using the CUTICURA and CUTICURA SOAP freely, and when he had taken one bottle of the CUTICURA