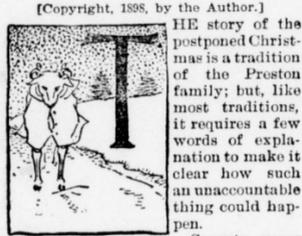


A POSTPONED CHRISTMAS.

BY P. M'ARTHUR.



HE story of the postponed Christmas is a tradition of the Preston family; but, like most traditions, it requires a few words of explanation to make it clear how such an unaccountable thing could happen.

Seventy years ago, when Henry Preston, the patriarch of an important Canadian family, settled in Kemoka, the strangely directed energy of Colonel Talbot was changing the wilderness on the northern shore of Lake Erie into a fruitful province. Year by year hordes of peasants came from Great Britain to take up land in the territory where he was almost an absolute monarch, and with them came many younger sons of noble families who were ambitious to make their fortunes in the new world. Among the latter came our hero, and it was in the first year of his exile that the little adventure occurred that all who enjoyed his acquaintance often heard him describe.

In those days a Canadian winter had many terrors that have since become a memory. The autumn rains changed the level country into a series of vast swamps, and when these miry reaches were frozen to a depth of several feet the winter had a foundation on which to build. In consequence, from the 1st of December to the middle of March there was almost uninterrupted cold weather, when the thermometer remained steadily at a point it cannot now reach without the aid of a cold wave from the northwest, but the swamps are now drained, the forests that held the snow have been cleared away and a variable climate has taken the place of the earnest weather that was then the rule. Even worse than the cold, however, was the almost unimaginable loneliness. When the winter had fairly set in, the intense frost put a check on all communication, even though it solidified and improved the roads that were usual-

could not find it, and during his first winter young Preston was often on the verge of despair. In his position as postmaster the poverty of the pioneers was brought home to him more keenly than in any other way. At that time the young colony was so misgoverned and every department of the public service was so scandalously conducted for the benefit of private individuals that the extortionate fees charged by officials frequently made letters cost from 5 to 7



"HOW DID YEH GET INTEH THE WRASSLE WITH MELCHISEDEC?"

shillings when they reached the office at which they were to be delivered. Letters from home were naturally the greatest source of pleasure to these lonely people, yet many were so poor that it was impossible for them to pay these fees. Letters that were not redeemed were exposed in the window of the office, and it was no unusual sight to see some of the unfortunates to whom they were addressed gazing at them with hungry eyes. Sometimes they recognized the handwriting as that of a loved one beyond the sea, and then the disappointment was all the more bitter.

To escape from the thoughts and feelings provoked by such surroundings and social conditions the young postmaster often put on his skates and found relief in the exhilaration he derived from skimming through the forest along the glassy streams, just as a business man of the present time escapes from his cares by retreating to his yacht and racing over the water under full sail. On one of these occasions about the middle of February of a forgotten year he plunged farther into the wilderness than ever before, attempting to trace a frozen creek to its source, and about noon suddenly emerged into a little clearing of whose existence he had not previously been aware. Knowing the hospitality of the pioneers, he decided to visit the little log hut that stood on the edge of the clearing and get his dinner before returning to his office.

After unstrapping his skates he started toward the house, from the stone chimney of which a cheerful smoke was ascending. He had proceeded but a few steps when he was confronted by an aggressive apparition that startled him into headlong activity. Just in time to escape a gnarled and twisted pair of horns, he sprang nimbly to the top of a stump. Beneath him stood the strangest creature he had ever seen. The head and horns were those of a sheep, but instead of a woolly fleece the animal wore a kind of overcoat made of hempen canvas sewed roughly with cords of basswood bark. A careful examination convinced him that his assailant was the venerable leader of a small flock of sheep, though he could by no means guess the meaning of his masquerading appearance. Having satisfied himself that the creature was not supernatural, he jumped down from the stump intending to proceed to the house, but before he had taken five steps he was sent headlong into a snowdrift. He was blinded and

half smothered by the dry snow, and as he partly rose to his feet, spluttering and clawing, he was bowled over again by his aggressive enemy.

Now Preston had heard in his youth that when attacked by a butting ram one should lie still and wait for the brute to go away. He decided to try the plan, but he made the mistake of his life. He had barely flattened himself out on the ground when the ram landed on the small of his back with the force of a pile-driver. The ram seemed inclined to use him as the circus clowns do the cushion on which they turn somersaults, and he quickly realized that though such a scheme might have been all right with a bellwether reared in the lap of luxury, it was a complete failure with this crook pated, cross grained old wretch who had taken to wearing a burlap overcoat and had a pair of horns that would have done credit to a dilemma. As soon as Preston recovered his breath he uttered a yell that roused the echoes for miles and rapped with his tormentor. He caught



"THAT'S THE LITTLE MAN THAT GOT MELCHISEDEC INTO TROUBLE."

him by the horns and together they rolled through the drifts, collided with stumps and sent the snow flying in clouds, while Preston's yells mingled with the frightened bleating of the ram. The uproar brought the farmer on the scene, and with a few well directed kicks he made the ram lose interest in the battle and return to his neglected flock, with his coat trailing after him. The farmer helped Preston to his feet and inquired:

"How did yeh get inteh the wrassle with Melchisedec?"

"Deelzeub, you mean, don't you? I was coming up to your house when the freak bunted me."

"Well, yeh mustn't be too hard on him, if yeh ain't hurt. Yeh ain't, are yeh?"

"No."

"Yeh see, he's had a lot to try his speerit this winter. The wind may be tempered to the shorn lamb, as the sayin is, but it ain't by a long shot for a shorn ram, and I kinder guess the fit of his overcoat ain't exactly to his likin. But 'scuse me for talkin so much before wishin yeh a merry Christmas."

"A what?" asked Preston as he looked at the farmer with an air of bewilderment.

"A merry Christmas."

"Nonsense, man. This is almost the end of February. Christmas was over two months ago."

"Not by a long shot it ain't. Today is Christmas, I tell yeh. Yeh must have got twisted when havin it out with Melchisedec. He didn't hit yeh on the head, did he?"

"Now, see here, what sort of nonsense is this you are talking about Christmas?" asked Preston, with the air of a man who was ready to get angry.

man who was at home with nature and had a way of making the best of the rougher side of life. His wife was a woman who was in every way in accord with him, and when Preston was ushered into the one room of the hut she returned his greeting shyly, but still frankly.

"This is the new postmaster, Jane," the farmer had said by way of introduction, "and old Melchisedec went at him as if he'd been keepin back a registered letter, and do yeh know," he added, with a wink that required fully half of his whiskered face to execute, "he didn't know that today was Christmas until I told him."

The woman looked at her husband laughingly and, understanding the meaning of his wink, she chimed in:

"That is funny, but I don't suppose he'll object to havin his Christmas dinner with us just the same."

"Well," replied Preston, looking hungrily at a huge wild turkey that was browning in a heavy iron pan on the coals before the roaring fireplace, "you may be poking fun at me, but that old gobbler is no joke, and he smells appetizing."

The bill of fare, though brief, was of a kind to satisfy an appetite sharpened by vigorous exercise in the open air. The savory turkey was stuffed with chestnuts, and there was a large wooden dish full of steaming potatoes that had been saved for the occasion. These, with fresh scones of johnnycake, completed the homely banquet.

While they were at the table there was a sudden stir in the pieces of blanket that covered a large sap trough in the corner, and the querulous cry of a baby was heard. The mother hastened to take her child from its primitive cradle, and while she was hushing him the father explained to the guest:

"That's the little man that got Melchisedec into trouble and made us postpone Christmas."

"But I don't understand how," said Preston.

"Well," replied his host half humorously, half defiantly, "hardworkin folks like us never have time for Christmas, but when this little fellow came along it didn't seem just right that he shouldn't have one. But things wasn't ready just in time. Yeh know yourself there couldn't be no Christmas without baby havin socks to be hung up, so we had to shear old Melchisedec to get wool, and as the socks didn't get made till this week we just naturally had to postpone Christmas until we were ready for it."

Preston entered into the spirit of the occasion and added a handful of pennies to the little doll and string of glass beads that Santa Claus had left in the stiff little pair of stockings, and the shadows were long before he passed the guard of Melchisedec and returned to his lonely office.

The Christmas Spirit.

"Peace on earth, eh?" growled old Crusty to his wife the day after Christmas.

"Peace on earth, eh? And you bought that boy a drum!"

JORDAN BROS.

—Dealers in—
Staple and Fancy Groceries, Dry Goods, Fresh, Salt and Smoked Meats, Fruit in season, Tobacco, Cigars, Confectionery and School Supplies.

A complete line of Fall and Winter Goods.

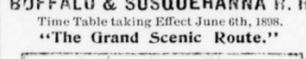
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No. 43, W. Fifth St., Emporium.

Traveler's Guide.

BUFFALO & SUSQUEHANNA R. R.
Time Table taking Effect June 6th, 1898.
"The Grand Scenic Route."



READ UP.

Stations	A. M.	P. M.	A. M.	P. M.
ar. K'ing Smt.	8:55	7:38	12:25	10:00
ar. Austin	8:10	7:08	12:00	9:15
ar. Costello	7:00	11:53	11:41	11:41
ar. Wharton	6:46	11:41	11:41	11:41
ar. Cross Fork Jct.	6:00	10:55	10:55	10:55
ar. Corbett	5:31	10:29	10:29	10:29
ar. Germania	5:20	10:18	10:18	10:18
ar. Galeton	5:14	10:12	10:12	10:12
ar. "	7:10	12:55	10:00	9:00
ar. Gaines	6:55	12:41	9:42	8:42
ar. Sabinsville	6:30	12:17	9:06	8:06
ar. Westfield	6:19	12:06	8:52	7:52
ar. Knoxville	6:05	11:50	8:30	7:30
ar. Osceola	5:55	11:41	8:07	7:07
ar. Elkland	5:51	11:39	7:58	6:58
ar. Addison	5:15	11:05	7:15	6:15

READ DOWN.

Stations	A. M.	P. M.	A. M.	P. M.
ar. K'ing Smt.	8:55	7:38	12:25	10:00
ar. Austin	6:40	1:05	8:29	9:50
ar. Costello	6:47	1:12	8:36	9:57
ar. Wharton	6:19	1:24	8:08	9:29
ar. Cross Fork Jct.	7:41	2:09	9:40	10:61
ar. Corbett	8:11	2:36	10:10	10:31
ar. Germania	8:22	2:47	10:21	10:42
ar. Galeton	8:28	2:53	10:27	10:48
ar. Gaines	8:52	3:08	10:51	11:12
ar. Sabinsville	9:21	3:37	11:20	11:41
ar. Westfield	9:33	3:43	11:32	11:53
ar. Knoxville	9:47	3:56	11:46	12:07
ar. Osceola	10:06	4:06	12:05	12:26
ar. Elkland	10:43	4:11	12:42	13:03
ar. Addison	10:34	4:43	13:15	13:36

STATIONS.

Stations	A. M.	P. M.	A. M.	P. M.
Port Allegany	10:40	12:40	6:30	8:30
Coleman	11:15	1:15	7:05	9:05
Bartsville	11:50	1:50	7:40	9:40
Roulette	12:25	2:25	8:15	10:15
Knowlton	13:00	3:00	8:50	10:50
Minerva	13:35	3:35	9:25	11:25
Olmsted	14:10	4:10	10:00	12:00
Hammonds	14:45	4:45	10:35	12:35
Coudersport	15:20	5:20	11:10	13:10

COUDERSPORT & PORT ALLEGANY R. R.
Taking effect June 15th, 1898.

EASTWARD.

Stations	10	4	6	2
Port Allegany	10:40	12:40	6:30	8:30
Coleman	11:15	1:15	7:05	9:05
Bartsville	11:50	1:50	7:40	9:40
Roulette	12:25	2:25	8:15	10:15
Knowlton	13:00	3:00	8:50	10:50
Minerva	13:35	3:35	9:25	11:25
Olmsted	14:10	4:10	10:00	12:00
Hammonds	14:45	4:45	10:35	12:35
Coudersport	15:20	5:20	11:10	13:10

WESTWARD.

Stations	1	5	3
Ulysses	1:32	2:30	10:05
Mina	2:07	3:05	10:40
Carpenter	2:42	3:40	11:15
Perkins	3:17	4:15	11:50
Newfield Junction	3:52	4:50	12:25
Gold	4:27	5:25	13:00
Raymond	5:02	6:00	13:35
Seven Bridges	5:37	6:35	14:10
Colesburg	6:12	7:10	14:45
Prink's	6:47	7:45	15:20
North Coudersport	7:22	8:20	15:55
Coudersport	7:57	8:55	16:30

STATIONS.

Stations	A. M.	P. M.	A. M.	P. M.
Ulysses	1:32	2:30	10:05	11:05
Mina	2:07	3:05	10:40	11:40
Carpenter	2:42	3:40	11:15	12:15
Perkins	3:17	4:15	11:50	12:50
Newfield Junction	3:52	4:50	12:25	13:25
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Raymond	5:02	6:00	13:35	14:35
Seven Bridges	5:37	6:35	14:10	15:10
Colesburg	6:12	7:10	14:45	15:45
Prink's	6:47	7:45	15:20	16:20
North Coudersport	7:22	8:20	15:55	16:55
Coudersport	7:57	8:55	16:30	17:30

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