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## The Weekly Herald.

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### CHRISTMAS MORNING.

OWN the stairs the maiden leaps,  
Down the polished, oaken stairs,  
Leaves the chamber where she sleeps,  
Undisturbed by Christmas cares.

Down the stairs the maiden leaps,  
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## THE MERRITT MATTER.

How Helen Blake Brought About A Christmas Reconciliation.



"I wonder what you'll be like at my age," said William Merritt angrily to his son Albert, one day memorable in the lives of both.

William Merritt was what the people called "a hard man to get along with." He was hard, just, sincere and severe. He began his life as a flatboat captain, and finished his training as sheriff of an Indian county. A born ruler, at 50 years of age he knew absolutely nothing of any methods save stern command and force ready for instant application. To this he added a habit of perpetual fault finding.

He had been going over the hoary harangue with which some old people have insulted young ones since the days of Homer, about the good boys and the industrious young men of his early life and the degenerate sons of these days, when Albert's satirical humor rose.

"You're mighty little account now," said the father. "What'll you be at my age?" "I suppose," said Albert, unconsciously imitating his father's sneer, "I'll do like other old men—sit and tell lies about the big things I did when I was a boy."

It was one of those insults which some men consider "the first blow." "What'll you be at my age?" He raised his broad, right hand, and foaming with rage, the father brought it down flat across the son's mouth. The blood flew from Albert's nose as he staggered back. He rallied, gazed an instant on the father, then turned away with clinched teeth and set purpose.

He sought his confidant, Sam McCorkle, the drunken shoemaker's boy near by, who was of the same age as Albert, but knew fifty times as much of the tricks and devices of the oppressed. At 18 years Sam was an expert in evasive tricks; at 18 he was simply a prodigy.

These two had met and conferred often—the sad, cynical, skeptic, whose father was among the well-to-do farmers of the community, and the finished trickster, whose father was the outcast; they often laid out wonderful plans of life in distant regions, but soon a fair young face rose before Albert Merritt's eyes, and he could not make up his mind to go.

It was the face of Helen Blake, only a few years before his schoolmate. But now Albert was resolved. If Helen thought of him as often as he did of her, she would wait for him to return, and if she were worth the waiting she would respect him more or less than the discomforts of his present life. Thus he reasoned.

Late that night two lads with small bundles might have been seen, but took care not to be, on the river road, and it was soon known to all the community that they had left the place. Albert had indeed written a brief note to his mother, in which he had bidden her a good-by of full of clumsily worded tenderness, and another to Helen, which he had formally begun "Miss Helen Blake," and in which he had as formally expressed the hope that, though absent perhaps for years, he would not be forgotten.

These epistles he took with him in his flight, and a day or two later entrusted them to Sam McCorkle to post, but that individual, fearful that the route of departure would be guessed by the postmark, calmly destroyed them, although he solemnly declared to Albert that he had deposited them in the postoffice of a considerable town through which they journeyed. And so the two boys were quite cut off from the old world of semi servitude.

That a father should be sorry for the flight of a son is not natural, that he should, while a spark of pride or anger remains, tell any of his sons would be contrary to all recorded precedents in such cases. William Merritt was not the man to violate precedents of discipline. He held himself stiffly, and saved away the subject complacently, and said when subject nearest her conviction that she would hear before either of his parents, though she could not have told you why, and probably would not if she could, for the best farm in Jackson township. Yet she knew it all the same, and visited the Merritts often, and at each visit it somehow fell out that something rather singular happened.

On one occasion she grew quite hilarious in reminiscences of a certain school exhibition, and told how the teacher had photographs of the whole class taken; a set for all, and how childish the pictures looked now, and how everybody had changed, though it was but six years ago, and then she brought out the photographs—cheap, tawdry things they were,



CHRISTMAS bells are ringing,  
Angels Pæns singing—  
To day the Savior's born.  
Away all thoughts of sadness.  
Break out in songs of gladness.  
This Happy, Happy morn.



but among them was one of a tall, fair boy, with all the glow of class leadership in his eye, and light hair curled about his forehead, and under it a round boyish script, was the autograph, "Albert Merritt."

A pang shot through the father's heart, and he longed for her to talk of his boy; but she rattled on about Tom and Jennie and Mattie, and soon hastened home.

Looking the mother noticed, and so they lay on the book glass stand for many a day, where the father often saw the presentation of his boy, but he never touched it, and they lay there till Helen came again.

This time she brought a "story paper" for Mrs. Merritt, saying the main story it had interested her very much; and after she was gone William Merritt picked it up and pined and shawed and ridiculed the pictures, but he read the story. It was a commonplace novelette of a son, who had fled from a harsh father and enlisted in the Federal army, and who was sick almost unto death in a southern hospital, and how in delirium he babbled of home, and how a Sister of Charity wrote to the father, who came and patiently nursed his boy back to life and love and forgiveness. A commonplace story—one of ten thousand war stories of the time—but the father's heart trembled as he read, and he rushed to the field and drove his work with unusual energy and shouted louder than ever at his team, and at night was stern and silent and solemn to a degree that surprised even his long suffering wife.

The other children would occasionally venture a reference to Albert, and when Helen came, she would blame the runaway; but she only listened quietly and asked if they had heard of him, and turned the talk to their school days. And so two years passed away and the third Christmas came. In celebration of the day the Merritts were to be the guests of the Blakes, and when they gathered in the big room of the great farm house, it happened that all the young people present were of that last day class at the head of which Albert Merritt had stood. Of course Helen Blake never thought of alluding to such a fact—it just happened so. Her parents thought—but there were plenty in a class of eight young people who could talk as fast as they could think, and usually did it, too. And so the conversation rattled on about that glorious day, and the father, whose heart was internally struggling were such that he could not tell whether he was eating turkey or oysters, talked loudly and aggressively to those at his end of the table, and quite overbore Mr. Blake on politics, and finally offered to bet "the pick of his horses again a yearling colt" that his candidate for the presidency would have 500,000 majority over any man the other side could put up next year.

When Helen Blake was told that Albert Merritt was a "runaway boy" she merely said, "Ah, indeed," and bent very low over her work; but she knew why he had gone—knew it, indeed, about as well as he did.

Ere long she and Mrs. Merritt seemed to have a good deal to say to each other. They seldom if ever mentioned Albert, but it always seemed that the mother was much cheered by a visit from Helen. In her own deponding heart the mother said: "He will never come back, he is too much like his father," a favorite delusion with mothers, by the way. And so, on this sad Christmas day, the two sorrowful women exchanged deep sympathies without exchanging a word on the subject nearest their hearts, and the mother felt that night as if volumes had been spoken on the subject, when in fact it had not been mentioned. And thereafter Helen came often and oftener, and somehow after each visit the mother felt an assurance that all would be right, and felt it just the same whether Albert's name was mentioned or not.

Now, after the first shock was passed, Helen Blake never felt a doubt in her bosom that she would be in good time receive some word from Albert Merritt, and she would have risked much on her conviction that she would hear before either of his parents, though she could not have told you why, and probably would not if she could, for the best farm in Jackson township. Yet she knew it all the same, and visited the Merritts often, and at each visit it somehow fell out that something rather singular happened.

On one occasion she grew quite hilarious in reminiscences of a certain school exhibition, and told how the teacher had photographs of the whole class taken; a set for all, and how childish the pictures looked now, and how everybody had changed, though it was but six years ago, and then she brought out the photographs—cheap, tawdry things they were,

with clasped hands and parted lips, she took the paper from her pocket. "I would like to read to you an article from The Teekewah (Kansas) Bugle," she said, in as steady a voice as she could command. And then she read the account of the fire, from headlines to dash, without a break, and without looking up. When she had done she raised her eyes. Mrs. Blake was crying quietly and the old man was quite broken down.

"Helen," he said, reaching out both hands to the girl, "it's no use. I can't be a hardened old fool no longer. Can't we get Albert back here with us? Hadn't I better go out to Kansas and get him? Poor boy, maybe he's hurt worse than it says." And then the old man let the tears flow uncontrolled.

That night a letter was mailed to Teekewah, Kan. It was written by Helen, though unsigned, and here is a copy:

Mr. Albert Merritt: The account of the recent fire in Teekewah and the bravery displayed by yourself on that occasion has worked a great change of opinion in certain quarters, a change which would have come soon, however, in the natural course of things. Your father is very much broken and anxious to see you.

A FRIEND.  
When Albert Merritt received this letter he was convalescing, lying on the bed of the best room of the Teekewah tavern, while Sam McCorkle was standing in the center of the floor telling some admiring friends for the thousandth time how "my pard here saved that gal baby." "I tell you," he said, "it takes the boys from old Indiana to do things. Now, I mind me one time before I came west of how little Jimmy Jones fell into the river, in I jumped right in without stopping to peel a bit."— And then he reeled off a wholly imaginary yarn of his own bravery, while Albert smiled and the rest listened open mouthed.

When Albert had read his letter he said quietly: "I'm going home for Christmas. I shall start as soon as I can do safely."

Sam was astonished, but he did not remonstrate, and finally concluded to go, too, "just to take care of Al," he explained to the boys, but secretly he was glad of the excuse.

The contents of the Teekewah Bugle contained this paragraph: "Our well known townsman, Mr. Albert Merritt, is about to visit his old home in Indiana, where he will probably spend the holidays. He is very nearly well of the injuries sustained at the recent fire. He will be accompanied by his fast friend, Mr. Sam McCorkle, the well known lightning rod agent."

"The stage was due to pass William Merritt's house at 4:30 o'clock on Christmas eve, but the roads were bad and it was quite dark when, with a sweeping curve, it swerved to the side of the pike and stopped in front of the house. The open door of half drunken men in street clothes against the flood of light within, stood the burly form of William Merritt, his hands outstretched with trembling hopefulness.

William Merritt was the same and yet not the same. His hair, which was just streaked with gray when his son Albert had left him, was now whitening visibly. His broad, burly shoulders had begun to stoop. His hard eyes had lost somewhat of their steadiness, and occasionally there were lines denoting mental pain visible in his austere countenance. His voice, too, sometimes quavered in a way that astonished no one more than himself. And one day just after the solemn election, the Blakes had begun to stoop. His hard eyes had lost somewhat of their steadiness, and occasionally there were lines denoting mental pain visible in his austere countenance.

There was a cry, in which recognition, welcome and forgiveness were all blended from the figure in the doorway, and an answer from the taller of the travelers, who still carried one arm in a sling. And a moment later William Merritt led his son into the house.

"Mother," he said, "our boy has come back."

In the ecstatic joy of meeting his mother, Albert had forgotten Sam McCorkle, and when he looked for him that individual had disappeared. As he afterward explained, he "didn't feel like he was any use when folks was all a-cryin' and a-weepin' and fallin' on each other's necks, so he just stopped."

But Albert did not look for Sam very long. He had much to tell of his new life in the West, where he had been fairly successful, and his father and mother and brothers and sisters had said as much to tell him.

The next day there was such a Christmas gathering at William Merritt's house as had never been there before. Such roast turkey with cranberry sauce, and such juicy mince pies, and such mealy potatoes, and such fine white home made bread, and such good things, dinned table partook of have never been excelled. All the Blakes were there, and so were all the members of that class of eight, where photographs were the first weapon Helen had employed in storming William Merritt's stony old heart.

And Sam McCorkle, too, the drunken shoemaker's son, full of far western dash and historian of the time "Al rescued the baby." He was "Mr. McCorkle," an honored guest, and he did not rise to the height of his glory till evening, for at the dinner table Albert would not suffer his own praises to be sung in too high a key. Even Albert, seeming to have something particular to say to Helen, whose great, brown eyes sparkled unwontedly, and whose cheeks persisted in blushing furiously, led her away with him into a quiet corner and left the field to Sam, that individual who had been so much in the heart's content and everybody else's delight, though he did not let slip the opportunities to tell of some things he himself accomplished in the West.

The close of this veracious history may be clipped from The Teekewah Bugle of March 15, 1869:

"Mr. Samuel McCorkle, the gentlemanly and enterprising agent for Flash & Hittner's justly celebrated lightning rods, has returned from Indiana healthy and happy. His friend and our former townsman, Mr. Albert Merritt, settled down upon his father's extensive farms. A little bird has whispered that the blind god had something to do with Mr. Merritt's decision to forego a share in the golden future of the Teekewah. Those who are curious in this matter are directed to the notice in this marriage column on another page headed 'Merritt Blake.'"

## FOUND AT FIVE POINTS.

A Christmas Story of Real Life, by David A. Curtis.



THE younger generation who know New York only as it has been for twenty years past, growing better all the time despite the sneers of pessimists. It is impossible to realize that only a few years farther back there was such a place in the center of the city as the Five Points. Nowadays it does not take unusual courage for a moderately athletic man to walk alone in broad daylight through any street in the city.

Then it was not safe to do so, and even policemen rarely ventured alone after dark into the region known by the old name. Now the horse cars run through the center of it. Broad streets have been cut through, and old buildings replaced with new. Factories and stores stand where formerly tumble down rookeries had stood since the last century, and that were swarming with the most degraded poor and the most desperate criminals. When the Rev. W. C. Van Meter, with a few friends as earnest and determined as himself, first started a mission school within the borders of this valley of the shadow of crime, he was repeatedly warned by the police of the dangers he incurred, and it was some time after he worked started before he dared to take, even under escort, in the middle of the day, the ladies who were anxious to aid by teaching in the school. It seems now like a story of a foreign land and under another age, but I saw in 1854 or 1855 a party of a dozen ladies and gentlemen mobbed as they started homeward from the school one Sunday noon, hustled into the street and assailed with volleys of obscene oaths and rotten vegetables, and so beset by a horde of half drunken men and women that they were glad to escape with whole bones and ruined garments. And the police seemed powerless to prevent or punish such outrages, for this was no unusual occurrence.

The region about what is now Paradise square, for the distance of a couple of blocks in every direction, was honey combed with blind alleys and secret passages, some of them running under-ground from one block to another. It was a city of refuge for criminals, and, though they warred and preyed upon one another with entire lawlessness, they combined as a unit to protect any one among them from the processes of the law. Aside from the criminals the population consisted almost entirely, if not quite so, of the poverty stricken, for dire poverty and desperate crime then, as so often in history, went hand in hand.

The children, who were coaxed one by one into the mission school room were a crowd of little savages. Their ignorance was something amazing. It was not very uncommon to find among them boys and girls of six or seven years old who did not know their full names, but who stoutly declared that "Sally" or "Bill" was the only name they had, and once or twice children were found who actually did not know whether they had ever had fathers and mothers. Some had no homes. God only knows how they kept alive, for they slept in holes and corners, and fed like vagrant cats and dogs on whatever they could beg, find or steal. Impossible? Certainly it is, but it is true, nevertheless.

Among the wildest and shyest of all who came in was a boy who was the originator of at least one famous joke, though without intention. The teacher asked him his name and he said it was George. Being asked what his last name was he said that was his last name.

"But you must have another name," urged the teacher. "Is it George Smith, or George Johnson, or George What?" "Nope," he said shortly. "Taint George. What nor George. Nothin', it's George. I ain't got no other name."

But the joke came when the teacher, wishing to know whether he had learned anything at all, asked him, "Do you know who made you?"

At the same instant a boy behind him stuck a pin into George. Such tricks were very common among the little savages, but it did not hurt any the less because it was not unusual. George jumped from his seat and shouted at the top of his voice, "God-dammit!"

"Well, that's right," said the teacher, who had not noticed the trick. "But don't shout so." The story was told afterwards, with enlargements, until it became a "chestnut" many years ago.

It was a long time—some months—before the teachers could learn much about the boy, for he was distrustful to the last degree. He kicked the Rev. Mr. Van Meter on the shins very violently, and twisted himself away like an eel when that gentleman, according to his habit, laid his hand affectionately on the boy's shoulder. George thought he was going to be beaten, and took his usual precaution of eluding the preliminary hold. He had, it seemed, never known what it was to have anybody take hold of him in kindness, and was no more to be handled than a young bird or a squirrel. There was hardly anything, in fact, that he did not know, as the good mission people recognized knowledge. He knew how to swear fluently, as his accidently correct answer as to his Makr indicated, but he did not know, and it was a long time before he could be made to understand that swearing was wrong. In fact, he did not know what wrong was. So far as his experience of life went, everybody did precisely what seemed at the moment desirable to do, unless prevented by superior physical force, or by bodily fear. Stealing was to him a perfectly legitimate mode of acquiring any thing that he might happen to want, and the only reason why it should be done secretly was that too much attention about the act was apt to provoke interference on the part of the owner, who might and probably would want the article himself. Lying was simply the easiest way of concealing anything that he did not care to reveal, and the only inkling he had of the objectionable character of

the act was that anybody to whom he told it he would beat him savagely if he did not lie cleverly enough to escape detection. As to the Sabbath, the first knowledge he had of the difference between one day and another came from his noticing that once in a while these people who had whole clothes on and who spoke gently came into the neighborhood and opened the little mission room and tried to get the children to go into it.

George was among those who were coaxed in with much difficulty, but after going once he went regularly. The room was clean and pleasant and the autumn days came on there was a stove put in and a fire made it warm. That was a novelty to him—being allowed to sit undisturbed in a warm room.

The story the good teacher obtained from him after winning his confidence was appalling by its very absence of detail; but it was only one of many like stories, and she could do very little to alleviate the misery that he had all around her.

George lived with a woman whom he had been taught to call Aunt Sally. Whether she was his aunt, who his mother or father was, whether they were alive, or whether, indeed, he had ever had a mother or a father, were matters concerning which he absolutely knew nothing, even by hearsay. Aunt Sally was negatively good to him, it appeared. She did not beat him, except when she was drunk, which was, however, much of the time. She let him sleep in her room, and when she had food she gave him some. When she was drinking heavily she did not bother about eating, and George had learned, as young as he was, to keep away from her, and get his food for himself. How or when she got it, only God's ravens could have told. Such cases are not so common in New York as they were twenty-five or thirty years ago, but they are found now and again, even in these days. Who Aunt Sally was, or why she took any interest whatever in him, he knew nothing about. She was a fact, and her interest, faint though it was, was a fact, and he had not come to the age of reasoning about facts. He only recognized them.

One day—and it chanced to be Christmas eve—a lady and gentleman appeared in the little room as visitors. They had read of the mission work, the gentleman explained, and had come from their home in a nearby city to see it and to give what little help was in their power. There was a story back of it, but this story was not told till afterward. Their name was not Harrison, so I may call them that.

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George lived with Aunt Sally.

"My wife," said Mr. Harrison, "is painfully, almost morbidly, anxious to do everything she can for poor children, especially for orphans. And about Christmas time she seems especially nervous about it. There is a story about it, of course, but it is too long and too painful to tell now." This to Mr. Van Meter, whose earnestness in his chosen work made him rejoice in every new found friend, and whose enthusiasm was contagious.

Before long the story was known. Mrs. Harrison's father was a wealthy manufacturer, whose two daughters were the children of different mothers, and developed, as they grew to womanhood strikingly different characteristics. The elder one, Sarah, was the daughter of his first wife, who had deserted him and her infant child to run away with one of his clerks. He knew little of her story after her flight, but in the course of a year and a half he learned that she had been forsaken by her lover and had plunged into such a terrible course of dissipation that death had been mercifully speedily in overtaking her. A year later he married the second time.

Again a daughter was born to him, and as the two children grew up they were treated, as nearly as possibly, exactly alike. Everything that money could buy, or affection dictate, was at their command, and every influence of refinement and education was exerted to fit them for a high place in society, but whether it was some hint in the blood, or a morbid brooding over a mother's sin and shame something led the elder daughter to turn away from good and seek evil from her early youth. The father sought in every way possible to avert the misery which he foresaw for himself and for her, but it was of no avail. A wayward youth was followed by utter recklessness as the unhappy girl became a woman. She still made her father's house her home, and would spend a large portion of her time there; but there were prolonged absences which the family strove in every way to conceal, and into which they dared not inquire closely for fear of shameful disclosures. The climax came in a peculiarly painful way. Among the gentlemen who visited at the house was Mr. Harrison, and it happened that, while the younger daughter was the one he sought in marriage, both the girls fell in

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"My wife," said Mr. Harrison, "is painfully, almost morbidly, anxious to do everything she can for poor children, especially for orphans. And about Christmas time she seems especially nervous about it. There is a story about it, of course, but it is too long and too painful to tell now." This to Mr. Van Meter, whose earnestness in his chosen work made him rejoice in every new found friend, and whose enthusiasm was contagious.

Before long the story was known. Mrs. Harrison's father was a wealthy manufacturer, whose two daughters were the children of different mothers, and developed, as they grew to womanhood strikingly different characteristics. The elder one, Sarah, was the daughter of his first wife, who had deserted him and her infant child to run away with one of his clerks. He knew little of her story after her flight, but in the course of a year and a half he learned that she had been forsaken by her lover and had plunged into such a terrible course of dissipation that death had been mercifully speedily in overtaking her. A year later he married the second time.

Again a daughter was born to him, and as the two children grew up they were treated, as nearly as possibly, exactly alike. Everything that money could buy, or affection dictate, was at their command, and every influence of refinement and education was exerted to fit them for a high place in society, but whether it was some hint in the blood, or a morbid brooding over a mother's sin and shame something led the elder daughter to turn away from good and seek evil from her early youth. The father sought in every way possible to avert the misery which he foresaw for himself and for her, but it was of no avail. A wayward youth was followed by utter recklessness as the unhappy girl became a woman. She still made her father's house her home, and would spend a large portion of her time there; but there were prolonged absences which the family strove in every way to conceal, and into which they dared not inquire closely for fear of shameful disclosures. The climax came in a peculiarly painful way. Among the gentlemen who visited at the house was Mr. Harrison, and it happened that, while the younger daughter was the one he sought in marriage, both the girls fell in

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