

FROM A MOTHER'S DIARY.

A Christmas Poem.



What I think I have heard to-day! They say my boy will soon be well— That on his cheek will cease to burn The fever-flare. They strangely tell His wasted strength will all return In pastures green where, undistressed, He shall be down to perfect rest:

And one will lead his tired feet Where flow the cool life-giving springs, And fresh the balmy air will blow With healing in its heavenly wings; The views of Time, demoted below From heights exalted will be seen Bathed in a never-fading sheen.

How blazed mine eyes, not to have known The angel stamped upon his face 'Till now, no eagle's single ray Of all the light that filled the place Wherein my patient darling lay! How dull mine ears not to have heard Celestial tones in every word!

Already on his childish brow Shines forth the promise of gain, But on my head the crown of loss. Strikes deep its cruel thorns of pain. I faint and sink beneath its cross, And cry: "O Saviour, Thou must give Thy strength or else I can not live!"

How wearily the days go by! Now that this shadow, dark and chill, Enshrouds my home forevermore! Lonely the house and deathly still; Through the closed shutters to the floor Struggles the light, with ghostly glare, As if some lifeless form were there.

And now my other children come With careful steps, subdued and slow, And with pathetic interest And eyes that often overflow, Hushing their harmless sport and jest, They sit beside the sufferer, And to his least wants minister.

Too weak to lie in my arms, Within his little bed he sleeps In broken rest day after day. While ever near the shadow creeps, And I can only watch and pray, Sitting with clenched and idle hands, Submissive to the dread demands.

How beautiful his face has grown! The saintly wisdom of the skies Lingers upon his infant tongue, A lustrous glory fills his eyes. Oh, with what agony it wrings My soul when first its awful light Smote through the darkness on my sight!

The holy Christmas time draws near, Fraught with its promises of joy. One with alone has power to thrill The bosom of my dying boy— To live till then—O God, fulfill His piteous prayer: then willing I'll give my angel back to Thee.

O, let me see the golden light Of perfect joy his face express To hold in memory evermore! Banish the look of weariness, The eager, glad surprise restore— One joyous laugh, one shout of glee, Would fill my heart with ecstasy.

The night moves onward toward the morn, The shadows break and flee away, And while the story unfolds part, Angels proclaim: 'Tis Christmas Day. From restless dreams of pain I start And hear the old hosannas roll In waves of peace across my soul.

Thou art not here, my gentle boy, Yet oh, what joys this hour are thine!— The anchor of enduring hope, The pearl of wondrous price divine, The tuneful harp of precious gold, The fruits from of the healing tree, The crown of life eternally.

Around me lie the paltry gifts I gathered for his longing hands— The books, the toys, a hundred things The loving heart alone commands; But what are these frail offerings Beside the largest Heaven bestows Amid the rapturous repose?

"Glory to God, good will and peace" Again that matchless anthem rolls. One voice I know—thine, mine, my child, The whelming storm of grief controls. A calm succeeds the billows wild And gives me also grace to say: "Glory to God" 'Tis Christmas Day.

JULIA H. THAYER.

JOE'S TURKEY.

you by the hand; you were engaged to one of the nicest girls in town. Now look at you! Poor, broken-down, friends and respectability all gone together. O, Job, Job, you're good for nothing!—unlucky," and the Deacon became impressive and shook his forefinger, "you may be of some use as a walking lecture on temperance."

Job Harkins wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "Well, Job, I'll try you. I've got something for you to do right off, that I know from past experience nobody can do better. I'll give you a dollar, a bed to-night, and such a Christmas dinner with my help, as you haven't had since we sent the turkeys down to the army. I want to keep you from the tavern to-morrow. Look there!"

He pointed to the stately occupant of the four-house. "By thunder, what a buster!" was the admiring comment. "Biggest in town," said the owner complacently. "I've fattened him carefully for myself; tips the scale at twenty-five pounds, just as he is. I'm going to have a dozen at the table to-morrow; the young man from the West that my daughter Sally is about to marry will be there. And that great bird I want you to kill, clean and dress in your very best style."

"I'll do it, Deacon."

"Now, mind! I'm trusting you as no man else would. I understand that some of those godless fellows of the village are going to have a turkey-affle at the tavern to-night. One of the wretches had the impudence to come here this morning and offer me five dollars for that turkey, just as he is. I told him I wouldn't take his weight in gold for him, for that purpose. So you look sharp; they're none too good to shoot him. Now, Job, go ahead. Get boiling water and knives, and any thing else you need, from the kitchen. The hatchet is behind the door. Work fast, and be just as faithful and careful as though the turkey was your own."

The brief December day was declining. It was almost sunset when Job Harkins, with his preparations all complete, and his materials about him, bound the legs of the victim, placed his neck over a log, and with one swinging blow of a sharp axe, decapitated him.

"Bravo, Job!—done like an old cavalryman. Was that the way you fellows used your sabers?"

Job looked at the man who had just cautiously climbed the rear fence of the deacon's premises. He had, in fact, been hiding behind it for the last fifteen minutes, overhearing the whole conversation.

"Don't you bother me, Sandy Badger. I want to do this job quick and well. Go 'way, and lemme alone."

"You needn't be so tetchy, Job. I guess a fellow might watch you. Seein' you handle the hatchet so cleverly put me in mind of the great cavalry fight I've heard you tell of. Which was it?"

Any provocation to talk about his service in the war was sure to draw Job out, as his cunning tempter well knew.

"Don't know. Might have been Brandy Station; might have been Yellow Tavern. Both big fights."

"Was you in both of 'em, Job?"

"Yes, indeed; and in a dozen other smaller ones."

"Which licked in those two?"

"We did at the Tavern; 't other one they called a kind of a draw."

So the talk went on until the turkey was cleaned and dressed. Holding it up, by the leg, Harkins said:

"Now, aim that beauty! More'n twenty pounds dressed, I really believe."

TED'S CHRISTMAS.

"I believe I'll go out to dinner," laughed young Clarice. "It's too darned mon, voted twelve-year-old Solomon, junior, rooffully."

"We must make the best of it," said the Deacon. "Such trials are sent to test our Christian equanimity. Sally, if the Captain is half the man I think he is, he won't mind it. He's eaten hard-tack and bacon on Christmas before now."

"But what shall we do?" Mrs. Cleghorn persisted. "Boil a ham; that, with your fixings, must do. What can't be cured must be endured."

"But the minister—"

"Well, Dorothy, I should hope the minister's piety don't depend on turkey for dinner. I shall tell the story at the table, just as it is; and they'll have to make the best of it, too."

This view was finally acquiesced in all round; in fact, there was nothing else to do. Mrs. Cleghorn and her girls busied themselves in the kitchen. Captain Bradstreet arrived before breakfast, and young Sol, reconnoitering at a parlor window, reported more hugging and kissing than he had seen in a year. Excepting the younger sister, who stayed at home to care for the preparations made, the whole family attended an extraordinary centennial Christmas meeting. They listened to a sermon an hour and twenty minutes long, and the deacon sang with unusualunction. At two o'clock all were gathered about the long table at home, with the minister, the doctor, the lawyer, and their wives, and the Captain. It was a bountifully spread board, even without a turkey.

"The grace before meat" was said, and the deacon, with a slight "ahem!" was about to proceed with his apology and explanation.

Then something very astonishing to him occurred. The door into the kitchen opened, and Job Harkins appeared, shaved, hair nicely brushed, and with a clean white apron. On a great platter he bore aloft the missing turkey, done to a beautiful brown, nicely garnished, presenting a perfect picture.

"Just out of the oven, sir," said Job with great solemnity, placing it before the Deacon.

The murmurs of surprise and approval caused by its unusual size allowed the good man and his family time to gather their wits, and appear as though nothing unusual had happened. A boisterous inquiry by Master Cleghorn as to where that came from, was promptly suppressed. The Deacon's spirits rose; the feast proceeded; the turkey and other viands were amply discussed, and before the domestic brought in the pies, fruit and coffee there were laughter, mirth and conversation all around the table. When young Solomon briskly said to his

older sister: "Sally, don't tread on my toes!" Captain Bradstreet, there was louder laughter and some confusion.

Job Harkins waited on the table, and when the company retired to the parlor he sat down with the domestic and the two men who labored in the Deacon's fields, and ate, as he had been promised, his best Christmas dinner since 1864. At nine o'clock, when the village guests had departed, Job was summoned to the parlor. He came slowly and diffidently.

"Harkins," said the Deacon, "you've redeemed yourself and surprised us. How was it?"

Job looked doubtfully at Clarice, who laughed mischievously. "He wants me to explain, father."

"I contrived a little plot when I found that the great turkey was safe. Job brought it here just after you all went to meeting. I stuffed and roasted it myself, telling the girl to say nothing about it. Then I made Job stay up in the men's room till dinner was ready, and he had his instructions, as you have seen."

"It was a deception, Clarice," said the Deacon.

"It was well done, anyway," said Captain Bradstreet.

"You've been saying that I couldn't cook," said Clarice, stoutly, to her mother and sister. "What do you think now?"

A Good Story for Some Parents to Read.

HEY'RE GOING to have a Christmas tree, an' nuts, an' candy, an' ice-cream!" said little Nan's eyes stuck out with the delights of imagination.

"My! Won't that be jolly!" Ted was the next speaker, and in the excitement of the moment he forgot himself so far as to emit a small, faint whistle.

"Stop that noise over there," said a stern voice, the owner of which looked out from behind the folds of the evening paper with a frown. Joseph Rexford was homely enough, taken at his best, but with an ugly frown added, he was terrific, though probably not aware of it, for people seldom get before a glass to make up ugly faces.

"They were only talking a little about Christmas," said Mrs. Rexford, timidly; the wives of such men are invariably timid, or else, in very bravado of despair, intolerable scolds, and Mrs. Rexford could never be that.

She would have been the sunniest and sweetest of little women, had she not been clapped under a bushel by Joseph Rexford at a very early stage in their married life, and, as might be supposed, she was pretty nearly extinguished by this time.

"Christmas!" he growled, contemptuously. "All nonsense and folly, they'd better tendin' to their rethmetic or a shellin' them seeds. I had to work evenin's when I was their age, an' hadn't no time to be hatchin' up foolery."

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," gently remonstrated the wife. "They're not too old to enjoy a little recreation, Joseph, and I wish we could give them a little Christmas treat." She wondered afterward at her own boldness, for she did not often venture within reach of the lion's claws, or, in other words, her husband's displeasure.

He looked at her in astonishment; he supposed he had her subdued, and the idea that she could propose any thing that had just put his foot on it as "foolery" shocked him.

"Mrs. Rexford," and his voice was a bit of condensed harshness, "I thought you knew my mind on sech triflin' years ago, and I want you to understand once and for all, I won't have it," and the big foot came down on the uncarpeted floor with a snap. "And you young ones, stop your snivelin' over there, or I'll give you something to snivel about," and the mighty potentate glared over in the corner, where little Nan was struggling with a sob of mingled terror and disappointment, for at her mother's kind words it seemed so easy to have just a little bit of Christmas, at least.

"Darn him!" whispered Ted, clenching his fists, and shaking them at the household monarch, who had again wrapped himself in his newspaper. "I'll run away, see if I don't, an' I'll have a Christmas tree every day when I get big."

His jacket would have needed no further dusting for months to come, if the parent could have seen the belligerent action, but, fortunately, the paper was not transparent, and Mr. Rexford was deep in an article on the Irish question.

He looked up presently; he had the complacent feeling of the bulldog, who comes up uppermost in the fight, and could look upon his vanquished subjects with amiable condescension. "I guess those Britishers 'll find they can't always abuse them poor Irishers," he said. "They'll find out, sooner or later, that it don't pay to aller play the tyrant."

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spending money for himself, yet fearing she would suspect, and knowing that she had little with which to carry out her own plans, he wisely forbore.

"I am going to the station to meet the ten o'clock train, Teddy," she said, as he was hitching Doll, "and you may meet me there with the sleigh."

"Father isn't coming home, is he?" said Ted, in consternation.

"No, dear," replied the mother, laughing at his alarm, "but I think there will be somebody there, and she darted into a dry-goods store, without explaining the mystery."

Ted went into another store to get warm, and then amused himself wandering up and down the street, looking into the shop windows, which were gay with Christmas goods, and thinking what he would buy if he had the means.

He had spent fully twenty-five dollars in this imaginary way, when he observed a stranger come out from one of the stores, and walk away briskly.

He had a pleasant face, and stepped off with the assured air of one who is accustomed to having the good things of this life. It was a warm, sunny day, and his heavy overcoat was thrown jauntily open, and, as he passed up the street he drew his handkerchief from an inside pocket, and blew his nose with a sonorous blast.

Ted was watching all this with interest, for the man's pleasant face had pleased his childish fancy, and as the handkerchief came out the boy saw another object fly out also and lodge in the dirty snow of the gutter, while the gentleman walked quickly on, quite unaware of his loss.

Ted's first thought was that it was only a piece of paper, and it did not occur to him to investigate the matter, but a second thought sent him flying to the spot, where, after some little search, he found a small package wrapped in white paper and decorated with an express label; there was evidently a small box within, and Ted ran as fast as his legs would carry him to restore it to the owner.

That jaunty gentleman was just getting into a handsome sleigh as Ted turned the corner, and a-very he went.

"Mister, mister," screamed Ted at the top of his voice, which the bells drowned, and then began a race—Ted running for dear life, the horses trotting along with no idea that they were pursued.

The boy's legs did him good service, however, and at last he succeeded in attracting the attention of the driver. "What's this, my lad?" he said, kindly. "Want a ride?"

"N-n-no," panted Teddy, all out of breath, "but you lost this, sir, and I picked it up," and he held up the package.

"Well, well, did I ever," said the gentleman, feeling hastily in his pocket. "What a careless trick. And so you've pretty near run your legs off to catch me, eh?"

"I guess they're all whole yet, sir," replied Ted, with a smile, and yet puffing with the race.

He handed over the box, while the stranger took out a fat pocket-book. "Christmas is coming, my boy, and may be you'll like an extra bit of surprise money," he said, good-naturedly, as he handed out a five-dollar bill to the astonished child.

"Oh, sir, that's too much," and Ted offered it back, quite overwhelmed by such magnificence.

"Well, I don't know about that," said the gentleman, "that box contains a watch worth two hundred dollars, and by the time I had advertised it and paid a reward, it would have cost me double the amount, besides the chances of my finding it again, so on the whole, I think I am rewarding you very moderately," and he buttoned his overcoat over box and pocket-book resolutely, and prepared to drive on.

A whole arena of Christmas presents danced through Ted's happy brain, as he thanked the generous gentleman for his gift, and they parted with mutual good feeling.

"If I had such a father as that," soliloquized the child, "what a good boy I'd be."

"If I had an honest, bright-faced boy like that," said the gentleman, "what a happy father I'd be."

Ted had never before kept a secret from his mother, and it was the hardest work to keep from telling his adventure, but secrets were flying in the air apparently and he held on to his with true Christmas tenacity.

He had suspected by this time who was coming on the train, and he was on time at the station with Doll; he had also wisely concluded to wait a bit for her advice and assistance before spending his wealth.

Aunt Nan stepped off the train when it came in, looking rozier and jollier than ever. Ted thought, as she hugged him up close to her warm furs, and she had the fattest satchel and the heaviest basket he had ever lifted.

There was a perfect jubilee of welcome when the party reached home, and Aunt Nan took her namesake and little Jane into her warm embrace, to their complete surprise, for they had never dreamed of such a happy arrival. "The little dears," said Aunt Nan, as she and Mrs. Rexford made several mysterious trips to the barn, returning with contraband bundles under their aprons, "they shall have our Christmas, if they never do another."

Such a merry-making the Rexford household had never witnessed before. Billy Grant had good-naturedly consented to go to the woods and cut a small evergreen, which was conveyed to the parlor secretly, and it was not as brilliantly lighted and trimmed as it might have been, it was a wonderful tree, nevertheless, hung with popcorn, apples and oranges and gifts, until the children were nearly wild with delight when they saw it.

A long pail, full of some mysterious compound, had been sitting in a tub in the woodshed, carelessly covered over with a piece of carpet, and this was found to contain ice-cream, and after all the other things had been distributed, it came piled up in delicious masses of frozen sweetness, on Mrs. Rexford's best china saucers, together with the angels' food which Aunt Nan had baked that day.

Mrs. Rexford actually cried with surprised delight when Ted gave her a lovely plush work-box, the first gift he had ever been able to make her, and told his story of the kind gentleman and his gold watch. Poor thing! she had enjoyed little of merit or gift-making since her marriage, and she enjoyed this one so kindly, cheerfully, and so unselfishly, that it came into her heart, cramped into space far too small for it, can enjoy liberty and love freely expressed.

"Mother," said Ted, when, at a late hour, Mrs. Rexford gathered her little flock together for their evening prayers. "It always seemed when I said 'Our Heavenly Father,' as if He was stern and cross just like father, but I think He must be good on He wouldn't let us have such a lovely Christmas."

"Teddy, poor child," said Aunt Nan, and her kindly bright eyes were full of tears. "Whatever comes, dear boy, don't forget that, whatever your earthly father may be, your Heavenly Father is all tenderness and love toward you."

Before Mr. Rexford's return, all traces of the festivity were removed; he seemed quite softened by the scenes through which he had passed, and if he noticed any expressions of sorrow, he would not have been moved by them. He said that he would not let the children ever forget their own "lovely Christmas."

Mrs. F. M. Rexford.

himself, but with his stern face at the table, the children would be obliged to sit for the father was a firm believer in the doctrine that "children should be seen, not heard," and allowed no frivolous chattering at meal-time.

She had been putting away surreptitious balls of butter and dozens of eggs, in the hope of being able to smuggle a few little trifles quietly into their stockings, but her heart was heavy with a sense of her inability to make the holiday such a one as she would like.

"Jane," said Mr. Rexford, coming in from the village with an envelope in his hand, "I don't know what ever you'll do, but I'll have to leave ye for awhile."

"What is it, Mr. Rexford?" she asked, in surprise; it was very seldom either duty or pleasure took him from home.

"Why John's dead, and they telegraphed me to come and tend the funeral, an' I s'pose it's my duty to go."

"Of course it is, Joseph," replied the wife, "and I'll get along all right. Billy Grant will come over and do the chores."

John was Mr. Rexford's brother, another branch of the Rexford family tree, which, though not as married and knotty as Joseph himself, still bore enough resemblance to prove his relationship beyond a doubt.

There had been as much of a repressed and unexpressed affection between them as could be expected, and this, combined with a sense of duty, procured his absence from home at this opportune moment for the children.

Such an event had only occurred once or twice in their life time before; oases in the dreary desert of their experience, which were looked back to with delight.

"How long shall you be gone, Mr. Rexford?" asked the wife. She could not mourn for the brother-in-law whom she had never seen but once, and whose attitude then had not been such as to inspire affection, and a faint hope was springing up in her heart that for once the children could have a holiday worthy of the name.

He looked at her in astonishment; he supposed he had her subdued, and the idea that she could propose any thing that had just put his foot on it as "foolery" shocked him.

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