THE POET'S APOLOGY.

No, the Muse has gone away—
Does not haunt me much to-day,
Everything she had to say
Has been said!
'Twas not much at any time,
All that she could hitch in rhyme;
Never was the Muse sublime
Who has fled!

Any one who takes her in
May observe she's rather thin;
Little more than bone and skin;
Is the Muse;
Scanty sacrifice she won
When her very best she'd done
And at her they poked their fun
In reviews.

"Rhymes," in truth, "are stubborn things,"
And to rhyme she clung, and clings;
But whatever song she sings
Scarcely sells.
If her tone be grave, they say,
"Give us something rather gay."
If she's skittish, then they pray,
"Something else!"

So she's cut the whole concern,
Lute and Lyre, and Torch and Urn,
Thoughts that breathe and words that burn,
Joys or woes.
For Parnassus is too steep;
And the only Muse I keep,
And that keeps me, writes a heap,
But it's prose!

—Andrew Lang.

DE "CHILLUN'S" CUP.

[By M.E.M.Davis in Harper's Young People.]

"I mought sell de chillun's cup," said Uncle Pete, reflectively. He got up as he spoke, and hobbled across the uneven floor to the bed in the corner of the cabin, and drew from beneath the flowered valance a small, antiquated, brass-nailed hair trunk. Throwing back the broken cover, he rummaged—muttering under his breath—among its strange contents, and presently took out a carefully tied parcel. Little Pete looked on breathlessly while the old man unrolled, strip after strip, the rags which enveloped the precious heirloom; and when the cup finally appeared, shining dully in the dancing rays of the firelight, he uttered a cry of wonder and admiration.

"Dem chillun is sholy had er monsus fine cup fer ter drink dey milk out'n, daddy," he said.

Uncle Pete turned it slowly, almost reverently in his trembling hands. It was an old-fashioned silver goblet, with a chasing of gold around the rim and about the slender stem. A fanciful arabesque of gold also encircled the initials engraved on one side. These were a little blurred by a deep dent which ran directly across them, for the cup was a good deal battered, and had evidently seen hard service—but they were quite legible, and read:

M. B. V.
&
C. B. V.
Red Hill,
1842.

"I mought sell dish yer cup," repeated Uncle Pete, slowly, "an' den ergin—" His voice dropped, and his childlike old eyes wandered vaguely about the forlorn little cabin.

Uncle Peter Venable's cabin stood on the edge of the great swamp which stretched back for miles away from the great river, green, dense, luxuriant, with fan-like palmettoes, moss-hung trees, and rank creepers mirrored in its dark, still pools, where alligators sunned themselves at noon, or moved stealthily at night in search of prey. It was hard upon Christmas; the wind blowing in from the marsh was damp and chill; the long black moss on the limbs of the giant live-oak in the door-yard swept the weather-boarding with a dismal soughing sound. But a cheerful fire blazed in the fire-place; a crusty smell of corn-pone escaped from the cracked spider on the broken hearth; a bit of bacon sizzled in the frying-pan; outside in the early dusk, Uncle Pete's grandchildren—except Little Pete—were at play.

Little Pete had come to lift the corn-pone from the spider and fetch a coal for Daddy's pipe. He remained gazing wistfully at the changing flames, his woolly head propped on his brown paw. His heart, in truth, was heavy about Christmas. "Daddy," he had asked suddenly, lifting his head, "what is we gwine ter do 'bout Chris'mas? De las' one o' dem fool nigger chillun out yander in do'-yard is sot dey head on er-hangin' up dey stockin's fer Santa Claus, same ez ef dey wuz bawn white. An' you knows, Daddy, dat dey ain' no Santa Claus gwine ter come foolin' roun' here in de eedge o' de swamp o'long o' er passel er niggers lak us! Ef I had de money fer ter git er doll fer de baby, an' some o'anges an' reesins an' candy fer de yethers, I mought be de Santa Claus myse'f—cep'n' fer comin' down the chimbley. But you an' me knows, Daddy, dat de mos' we kin do wi' sellin' moss an' split baskets is ter git er dust o' meal fer dem chillun, much lessen buy Santa Claus."

Uncle Pete's cheerful face had fallen. "Dass so, honey," he had said, with a mournful sigh; and then he had fetched out the cup

Little Pete's heart fluttered anxiously as he awaited the old man's decision.

"An' den ergin," Uncle Pete went on, lifting his head proudly, "dey ain' money ernough, ner lan' ernough ner hosses an' mules ernough in de whole endurin' worl' fer ter buy dish yer cup. Dey sholy ain'. Chile," he continued solemnly, laying his hand upon the boy's shoulder, "you wuz bawn free, bless de Lawd! an' yo' freedom can't be tuk'n fum you. Dese times, when dey ain' no mo' slaves an' no mo' masters, is fine times. But de old times befo' de wah was fine times too, an' ole Pete is sometimes hongry fer Red Hill an' Marse Cass."

Little Pete leaned against his grandfather's knee and looked expectantly in his face.

"We-all's fambly was de Venables. An' Marse Cass Venable wuz de owner o' Red Hill, de fines' plantation in Calhoun county. De cotton fiel's at Red Hill wus lak snow in pickin'-time; an' de co'n fiel's—mum! dey wuz yaller ez gol' when de co'n wuz fitten ter pull. De Quarter wuz lak er hive o' bees wi' niggers. An' de smell o' 'possum fat an' shote an' sweet-taters an' ham-bone riz high fum dat Quarter."

"M-m-m!" said Little Pete, his mouth fairly watering.

"Marse Cass wuz er good marster; an' ez fer de mistiss, she wuz er angel o' de Lawd 'mongs' de sick women an' ne ailin' babies at de Quarter. Dey wa'n't er han' on de place dat wouldn't er laid down on de groun' an' let her walk over him ef she wan' ter.

"Dey wa'n't no chillun at the gre't house, an' marse he wuz gittin' er little ole. But one mawnin—I 'members dat mawnin' mighty well; hit wuz er Chris'mas eve—marse saunt word ter de Quarter dat he wan't ter see us all up at de gre't house. An' we all march up ter de gre't house steps, sof' lak, 'case we know'd dat de mistiss wa'n't well. De house wuz all shet up, an' seem lak it look mo'nful. 'Reckly de do' open and marster come out He wuz totin' er bundle, an' his head wuz er-hangin', an' he stumble so dat 'pear lak he gwine ter fall. He look fer erway 'cross de fiel's, fer erway, fer er minit. Den he cl'ar his th'ote an' say: 'Frien's, de Lawd Gawd is stretch out His han' in de middle o' de night fer ter put my house in mo'nin'. Yo' mistiss is walkin' dis mawnin' in de streets o' de New Jerusalem, an' dish yer is what she has lef' us.' Wi' dat he onkivered de bundle, an' dar wuz dem two teenchy-weenchy twin boys. De women all 'gin ter cry, an' de men wa'n't fer behine 'em. We all step up an' kiss dem li'l' sof' red han's, an' fum dat day de las' one o' de Red Hill people would er died fer mistiss's twin boys."

"An' den ole marse he gin de chillun de cup, Daddy," said Little Pete, to whom the story was ever knew and wonderful.

"Yaas, at de chris'nen Marse Cass gin dem chillun dish yer cup. One cup fer de two. 'Caze he say dat dey is come into dis worl' tergether, an' de boun' fer ter drink de same draf' whilse dey heads is hot. An' dey did use dat cup, sho'! Seem lak I kin see 'em yit drinkin' out'n it, fus' one an' den t'other, 'twel the las' day. Yaas, dem twins wus lak one heart in two bodies! Ef Marse Marcellus catch de measles, Marse Camillus sho' ter grunt wi' de measles too. Ef Marse Camillus git in er fight—an', mun! dem boys wuz fighters!—Marse Marcellus ready to pull off his coat an' jump in de fight. Dey couldn' b'ar fer ter be erway fum one ernuther er minit. An' seem lak dey couln' b'ar fer ter git out'n Unk Pete's sight. 'Caze fum de time dey kin toddle dey wuz onder Unk Pete's foot. Yes, chile, dem wuz fine times at Red Hill whilse de two young marsters wuz growin' up."

"An' den de young marsters is rid off ter de wah," prompted the child, as the old man fell into a silent reverie.

"Yaas, seem lak dey wa'n't much mo' dan babies, wi' dey yaller curls and blue eyes. But dey jes boun' fer ter go. An' dey sholy wuz de fines' pa'r er young gentermen dat ever straddle er hoss de mawnin' dat dey rid up ter de front steps er de gre't house ter tell ole marse an' de black folks good-by. Ole marse, he come out'n de do' wi' his gray head hel' high, an' dish yer cup in his han' full o' Red Hill cider—dey never wuz no cider lak de Red Hill cider! An' he hel' it up, fus ter Marse Marcellus, an' den ter Marse Camillus, an' he say, solemn-lak: 'Boys, 'member, wharever you go you is boun' fer ter shar' de same cup.' An' den dey rid off wi' Big Jerry fer er body servant. An' I ain' never seen dem chillun sence dat mawnin."

"Whar you reckin dey is now, Daddy?"

"I dun'no' chile. Mebby deir heads is onder de groun, long o' marster's. 'Case, 'reckly ole marse ride off a'ter de twins. But befo' he go, he fotch out the cup an' he gin it to me. 'Pete,' he say, 'you tek keer o' de cup 'twel de chillun come home.' An' den dey refugee all we black folks ter Texas, less'n de Yankees git us...... Den come word dat marse is died befo' he git ter Firginny...... Den de Angel o' Peace is sounded de trumpet, de onrighteous wah is at er een, an' freedom is come, de Lawd be praised! But when I mek my way back ter de ole place, hit was in de han's o' strangers; an' nobody ain' able ter tell me et dem twins wuz in de lan' o' de livin' or onder de groun'. An' so we is drifted down dish yer way, whar you chillun wuz bawn; an' whar yo' mammy an' yo' pappy is died. Yaas, chile, ole marse an' mistiss is loved, an' trusted Pete whilse dey wuz livin'. Dem chillun is been lak de apple o' Unk Pete's eye whilse dey wuz onder his foot. An' dat huccome I say dat dey ain' money ernough ner lan' ernough ner hosses an' mules ernough in de whole enduring' worl' fer ter buy dish yer cup whilse Unk Pete Venable's head is hot."

"You is mighty right, daddy—mighty right!" cried Little Pete, his eyes sparkling.

Uncle Pete pushed the trunk back under the bed. But he placed the goblet on the mantel shelf. "I gwine ter leave it whar I kin look at it," he muttered softly.

At that moment Cammy, the squat brown twin-sister of Little Pete, bounded noisily in. "Daddy!" she cried, "git down yo' banjo an' pick 'Sugar in de Gode,' er 'Billy in de Low Groun's.' Me an' Dick gwine ter dance whilse Jincy 'pat er Juba'."

The old man laughed indulgently, and took his banjo from the wall. "You set dar an' watch de co'n pone, Little Pete," he said, as he followed the girl out into the door-yard.

Little Pete squatted down before the fire, and dropped his head in his hand again. Meagre and stunted as he was, with his weazened little face and big serious eyes, he shared the responsibility of the orphaned family with his grandfather, who was feeble and rheumatic. He and Cammy were barely eleven years old, and there were besides, Jincy, and Dick, and Dan, and Isham, and Judy, and Louisa-Lou, the baby. "Dat meks seven stockin's, not countin' o' mine er daddy's," he sighed, "an' how in de name o' goodness is I gwine ter stuff them stockin's! I mought sell the chillun's cup," he repeated the phrase mechanically. Then he started violently and looked over his shoulder. The cheerful staccato notes of the banjo were ringing out over the swamp; the shuffling sound of bare feet on the ground, mingled with the measured Juba pat and Uncle Pete's gay exhortations to the dancers:

"Twis' yo' feet dar, Dick. Tu'n out dem toes, Cammy. Pat 'er up, Jincy. Step in, Louise-Lou, an' show dem niggers how ter wire de crack!"

Little Pete climbed stealthily upon a chair and took down the goblet, turning it slowly in his hands, as he had seen his grandfather do. "I *mought* sell de chillun's cup," he whispered, fearfully, "but den, ergin—" he pushed it back in a spasm of terror and jumped down from the chair—"but den, ergin, how I gwine ter look Daddy in de face when he ax me what I done wi' de chillun's cup," he panted, trembling in every limb of his lean little body.

Outside, the music was waxing more furious. Uncle Pete's bony fingers skipped joyously over the strings. His voice arose in a wild and fantastic melody; the children, shuffling monotonously, joined the chorus:

"Whar is you gwine? says de alligator ter de jay—
Oh, la, dis mawnin'!
I's gwine ter buy er bucket fer ter tote de san' away—
Oh, la, dis mawnin'!
How you gwine ter buy er bucket, 'dout money fer ter pay?—
Oh, la, dis mawnin'!
Oh, la, honey!
Ef I 'aint got no money
I kin step in er sto' an' sell myse'f ter-day—
Oh, la, dis mawnin'!"

Little Pete lifted his head. A broad grin overspread his face. His eyes danced. "Dass so!" he cried, turning a hand-spring, and throwing his yellow heels in the air; "an' I gwine ter do it, sho's you bawn." He dashed, with a whoop, out into the door-yard.

"Git out'n de way dar, Dick," cried Uncle Pete, with a chuckle. "Yo' betters is gwine ter shake dey foot. Step in lively, Little Pete, an' bresh up de dust."

"How you gwine ter buy er bucket 'dout money fer ter pay?"

he sang lustily, patting a broad, bare foot; and Little Pete's voice rang out with the others in the rollicking chorus:

"Oh, la, honey!
Ef I 'aint got no money,
I kin step in er sto' and sell myse'f—
Oh, la, dis mawnin'!"

II.

The next afternoon Little Pete, with a nest of newly woven split baskets on his arm, walked briskly along the banquette in Royal street, looking critically from one side of the street to the other, and halting occasionally before a grilled corridor or a flight of marble doorsteps. His rags fluttered in the wind, but that he did not mind, for it was a soft and lazy wind that drifted about, scattering everywhere the scent of roses and honeysuckle, and the pavement under his bare feet was warm with mellow sunshine. The shop windows! Nowhere are such shop windows as in New Orleans at Christmas. Here and there Papa Noel, large as life, and carrying a snow-dusted fir-tree on his shoulder, smiled bravely in his gray beard; dark-eyed children, with red lips and glowing cheeks, were gathered about the Christmas marvels; men and women, with their arms filled with bundles, jostled each other, laughing, and exchanged gay greeting in musical foreign tongues.

"Chris'mas is comin', sho'," grinned Little Pete. He stopped before a show-window, his eyes big with admiration. "M-m-m!" he muttered. "Dar's edzackly de spit o' de doll dat I done been studyin' 'bout fer de baby. An' dat teenchy-weenchy cheer fer Judy. An' dat toot-hawn fer Isham! An' er pipe fer Daddy! An' mebby er taw fer Dick an' Dan, an' sumfin' fer Cam an' Jincy! An' ef I kin get 'em, den I gwine ter dress up, an' stuff dem stockin's same ef I wuz Santa Claus hisse'f!"

He tore himself reluctantly away, and walked on, pausing uncertainly from time to time as before. Finally he stopped with an air of decision in front of a large open corridor, at whose farther end glimpses of a garden showed against a red brick wall. "Dis'll do," he declared, half aloud.

A slim, well-dressed yellow lad was leaning idly against the iron grille. He looked contemptuously at the little bunch of rags. "Git along with yo' baskits," he said. "We ain't buyin' no trash."

Little Pete returned his look defiantly. "I ain' got no business 'long o'er yaller nigger lak you," he said, with an air of scorn; "an' I ain' sellin' no trash. I wants ter see de marster o' dish yer house."

The lad laughed. "De marster!" he exclaimed. "In de name o' goodness, does you reckin de marster gwine to trouble hisse'f 'bout a black skeercrow like you?"

"I wants ter see de marster," insisted Little Pete, "an' I ain' axin' you ef I kin see him."

"Jerry!" called a voice from the end of the corridor.

"Yes, sah," said Jerry, respectfully, straightening himself up.

"Bring that child here."

"Yes, sah," said Jerry. "Git erlong," he added, giving Little Pete a good-natured shove; "de marster wants to tek yo' head off'n yo' shoulders."

Little Pete walked bravely along the corridor, though his heart thumped against his ragged shirt. In the small court-yard red and white roses bloomed on high trellises, and a fountain, ringed with Parma violets, sent its light spray toward the blue sky. Garden chairs were set about under the closely-trimmed orange trees, and a long bench was placed against the high wall, with its overhanging vines. On this a gentleman was seated, with an open book in his hand. He had a kindly face, and a pair of the bluest eyes that Little Pete had ever seen. His light curling hair and thick beard were tinged with gray, and his shoulders drooped a little; but an air of vigorous health pervaded his tall, robust figure.

"Well, sir," he said, as Little Pete came across the clean flags, followed by Jerry, "what do you want?"

Little Pete stood silent a moment, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and turning his ragged hat awkwardly in his hands. Then, all at once, he blurted out, "M-m-arster, does you want ter buy er nigger?"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the gentleman, taken by surprise.

Jerry giggled audibly.

"Caze ef you want ter buy er lakly nigger you ain' gwine ter fin' er laklier nigger anywher's dan me."

"What can you do?" asked the gentleman, leaning back in his seat, and smiling.

"Why, marse, what kin I do? Dey ain' er laklier nigger dan me in New Orleans! I kin mek co'n pone, an' split kinlin', an' beat up beds, an' kiver up de fiah at night, an' fetch coals fer yo' pipe, an' mend de holes in yo' breeches, an' fry catfish, an' run yo' a-rons, an'—an' open de do' fer yo' comp'ny," he added, boldly, glancing over his shoulder at Jerry.

"And about how much are you worth?" demanded his listener, whose eyes were twinkling with a keen appreciation of the joke.

Little Pete breathed hard. He opened his lips once or twice to speak, and closed them again with a snap. Suppose he should ask too much, or too little! His eyes grew wide and imploring. "I is sho, marster," he stammered at last, "dat I is gwine cheap fer er dollar."

The gentleman laughed outright. Poor Little Pete felt the tears come into his eyes. He thought of Louisa-Lou pattering about the cabin floor out yonder by the swamp, and his throat swelled. His head seemed to be spinning around and around.

"Why do you wish to sell yourself?" he presently heard the gentleman asking.

"Well, marster," he said eagerly, "hit's jes' desh yer way: Pappy an' mammy is dead, an' me an' seven yether chillun lives 'long o' grandaddy; an' Daddy is dat ole dat he ain' able for ter do much wuk. An' hit's all me an' Daddy kin do, wi' sellin' moss an' baskits, fer ter feed dem chillun, much less'n buy Santa Claus. An' de las' one o' dem fool nigger chillun is done tuk it in dey heads ter hang up dey stockin's fer Santa Claus, same ez if I dey wuz bawn white. Now, you knows, marster, dat no Santa Claus ain' gwine ter come foolin' roun' er nigger cabin de eedge o' de swamp. An' so's ef I kin git de money fer ter buy er doll fer Louisa-Lou, an' some o'ranges an' reesins an' candy fer de yethers. I kin be de Santa Claus—'cep'n comin' down de chimbly—an' stuff dem stockin's myse'f. Hit ud be er plumb shame fer dem chillun ter get out'n dey pallits Chris'mas mawnin' an' fin' nothin' in dem stockin's 'cep'n de holes. An' dat huccome I mek up my min' fer ter sell myse'f. I kin come an' git ter wuk de mawnin' a'ter Chris'mas," he concluded, anxiously.

The gentleman, still smiling, thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out a silver dollar. "Now, sir," he said, with assumed sternness, dropping it into the small brown palm, "you belong to me."

"Yaas, sah," grinned Little Pete.

"And you are to be here the morning after Christmas to begin work; 7 o'clock sharp."

"Yaas, marse."

"By-the-way," he added, as the boy ducked his head, "what is your name?"

"Dey calls me Little Pete, sah, but I name Marcellus, sah."

Mr. Marcellus Venable looked at him with renewed interest. "Ah?" he said. "Marcellus what?"

"Marcellus Venable, sah."

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Venable, rising from his seat. "How came you by that name?"

"Hit's jes dish yer way, marster. We-alls white fambly wuz de Venables. An' Marse Cass Venable wuz de marster o' Red Hill, de fines' plantation in Calhoun county. De young twin marsters o' Red Hill wuz name Marcellus an' Camillus, an' when me an' Cam wuz bawn twins, Daddy done name us a'ter de young twin masters. Cam, she's er gal, but Daddy say dat doan mek no diffunce. An' dat huccome I name Marcellus Venable, sah."

Mr. Venable's face had grown a trifle pale, and the hand resting on his cane trembled. "And what is your grandfather's name?" he asked.

"Peter Venable, sah; dey calls him Unk Pete."

Mr. Venable was silent a moment. "Very well, Marcellus," he said, laying his hand gently on the little woolly head. "You can go now; but remember, you belong to me."

"I ain' gwine ter fergit, marse," cried Little Pete, darting into the corridor, where he stopped to throw a somersault and stand on his head.

"Jerry," said Mr. Venable.

"Yes, sah," said Jerry, promptly.

"Follow that boy quietly, you understand; see where he lives, and report to me when you come back."

"All right, sah," responded Jerry; and a moment later he was on the banquette, padding noiselessly after the small dusky figure that zigzagged from side to side of the street, peering into doorways and loitering before crowded shop windows.

That night Mr. Marcellus Venable, bachelor, sat late before the low fire in his spacious library. Jerry came in, made his report and went out. There was a joyous hum of voices in the narrow street outside, and a preliminary popping of fire-crackers; within the big lonely house the few noises died away early. But the solitude was strangely peopled for its master. All of the old-time inmates of Red Hill seemed to come trooping in and to fill the silences with their half-forgotten voices. There was the dear indulgent face of his father smiling at him; and the kinsmen and friends that were wont to gather about the roaring hickory fires at Red Hill. And yonder came swarming up from the Quarter the dusky retainers among whom his bright youth had passed. Foremost of all was Uncle Pete. "God bless him!" cried the lonely watcher aloud. "God bless him for a faithful honest soul." But that was not all. Do what he would, turn where he would, he could not put away from him a boyish face framed in yellow curls, with sunny blue eyes that laughed into his. He frowned, looking at this face, and his own was not pleasant to see, as the veins in his forehead swelled and his mouth contracted. "Never!" he exclaimed at last, bringing his clinched fist heavily down on the table beside him. "If he should crawl at my feet and beg my pardon, I would not forgive him!"

At almost the same moment Mr. Camillus Venable, away up in the Garden district, was putting his latch-key in his front door, after an evening at his club; for he was a widower, and his only son was away at school. In his cozy sitting-room, Maria, his housekeeper, an old Red Hill servant, was awaiting him. She bustled about, attending to his comfort, and finally came and stood behind his chair.

"Marse Camillus," she said, "seem like Uncle Pete Venable is turned up."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed her master. "When?"

"My boy Jerry, dat waits on Marse Marc, dat lives down yander in de French Quarter, has got de track of him dis evenin'. Uncle Pete is teckin keer of er big gang o' gran'chillun. He's pow'ful ole and stiff-j'inted, an' Jerry say dat look like he ain' gwine ter live long."

"Send Jerry to me," said Mr. Venable.

After Jerry had gone, Mr. Camillus Venable fell to musing over the fire. Dear me! He was a boy again, and it was Christmas times at Red Hill. His father, at the head of the long table shining with glass and silver, was toasting the memory of his mother; —the guests were standing and drinking in silence. Down at the Quarter the banjoes were ringing; the boys and girls were dancing. Uncle Pete's cabin door was wide open; the red light streamed out; within, Uncle Pete, in the corner of the fire, was telling one of his marvelous stories, and he and Marcellus—Mr. Venable straightened himself up abruptly, and grew very red in the face, and roared out loudly, "If he ever dares to speak to me, I'll break every bone in his body!"

Alas! the Venable feud was a very bitter one. The quarrel, over a trifle, be it said, had been hot. The twin-brothers had parted in anger, and it had been twenty years and more since Mr. Marcellus Venable and Mr. Camillus Venable had spoken to each other.

III.

Christmas Eve, and the weather had turned off raw and cold.

From the mantel-shelf in Uncle Peter Venable's cabin depended a row of ragged stockings. They were of many sizes, from Cammy's bulgy blue ones at one end, to the baby's shapeless red sock dangling from a nail in the chimney-jam, where she had hung it herself.

The children had been long asleep on their scant pallets at the foot of Uncle Pete's four-post bed. A big fire burned in the fire-place. In one corner of the hearth Uncle Pete was sitting; his split-bottomed chair was tilted back, his eyes were closed, and his fingers were straying lightly over the banjo resting on his knees. In the opposite corner Little Pete was huddled, his feet drawn up under his chin, his hands clasped around his knees, and his eyes fixed mournfully on his grandfather's face.

"How is daddy gwine ter git erlong 'dout me?" he was inwardly groaning. "Who gwine ter he'p daddy tek keer er dish yer passel o' chillun? Who gwine ter wrop de baby up when de win' blow col'? Who gwine ter fetch Daddy er coal fer his pipe? 'Caze Cam an' Jincy dey ain' nuthin' but no-count gals! Daddy," he said aloud—Uncle Pete unclosed his eyes drowsily—"I ain' had de heart ter tell you befo', but I has sold myse'f ter er genterman in de city, an' I—is—er—slave." A lump came into his throat, and he paused.

"You wuz bawn free," said Uncle Pete, half asleep; "but—dem—wuz—fine times." His eyes closed again.

"I mought break my word," muttered Little Pete. "But den, ergin, I is er Venable, an' de Venable doan' break dey word."

The banjo slipped from Uncle Pete's knees to the floor. He was asleep. Little Pete jumped up; his face cleared.

"I doan' keer," he cried, "hit's wuth bein' er slave ef Daddy an' de chillun kin git er good Chris'mas! An' Santa Claus gwine ter come dis time, sho'!"

He stole over to the bed, pulled out the trunk, and possessed himself of Uncle Pete's blue cloth suit trimmed with brass buttons. When he had got himself into it, turning up the trousers legs and turning back the coat sleeves, he dived under the bed again, and fetched out the fore-and-aft bandbox which contained Uncle Pete's long-cherished white beaver hat. The coat-tails dragged on the floor, and the hat slipped down to his chin whenever he turned his head. But his face was illuminated with a grin so happy that, ludicrous though he was, he was good to look at as he twisted about in a vain effort to get an all-round view of himself.

"Now, den, I mus' git my pack," he chuckled. He went out, but reappeared in a moment with an old sack slung on his shoulder. It was a very forlorn and meagre little pack; but he carried it proudly, with his head cocked on one side and his back bent jauntily.

He eased it gravely down on the hearth, and reached out for Louisa-Lou's stocking. As he did so a puff of wind struck him in the back. He turned. The door had swung open, and—yes, it must be!—Santa Claus himself was coming in. He wore a furred overcoat, and he carried a huge bundle in his arms. Little Pete's jaws dropped, and, truth to tell, a gray pallor overspread his black face. He tried to cry out, and he made one step toward the safe refuge of his grandfather's knee. But he stopped, frozen with terror, for the door had opened again, and another burly, fur-coated, gray-bearded Santa Claus, with a bundle in his arms, stepped noiselessly in.

As the foremost intruder came within the circle of fire-light Little Pete saw that it was not Santa Claus, after all, but his new master. He fell on his knees. "M-m-arster," he pleaded, "I knows I is yo' nigger, sholy you ain' gwine ter mek me go befo' de chillun an' Daddy git deir Chris'mas?"

Mr. Marcellus Venable did not hear him. He had turned at a slight sound, and found himself suddenly face to face with Mr. Camillus Venable. The two men dropped their bundles and glared at each other like trapped animals.

Just then Uncle Pete awoke. For a second he was dazed, and he rubbed his old eyes, peering intently into the faces above him. Then he sprang to his feet. "De chillun!" he gasped. "De mistiss' twins! De young marsters!" He choked, and the tears rained down his wrinkled cheeks. "De Lawd's name be glorified!" he cried, pressing up to them, and holding up his trembling hands.

They took no more note of him than of the little kneeling figure in its grotesque toggery. They were scowling bitterly at each other, their blue eyes flashing with rage.

"How dare you?" said Mr. Marcellus, taking a step forward.

"How dare you?" shouted Mr. Camillus, lifting his clinched fist.

"De mistiss's boys, dey is gwine to fight!" groaned Uncle Pete. Suddenly he reached up and caught the goblet from its place on the mantel, and edged himself in between the brothers. "Look at dish yer chris'nen cup, boys," he said, solemnly. "Marse Cass is gin it ter you when you wuz de teenchy-weenchy babies dat the mistiss lef'. One cup for de two. 'Caze you is come inter de worl' han' in han', an' you is got ter drink de same draf' whilse yo' heads is hot. An' I reckin dat mighty nigh de las' word you ever hear Marse Cass say—de mawnin' you rid off ter de wah—wuz, 'Boys, 'member dat wharever you go, you is boun' fer ter shar' de same cup.'"

There was a strange stillness in the little cabin. Little Pete's eyes turned wonderingly from one angry face to other. The old man's white head dropped on his breast. All at once there was a rushing sound—"Hit wuz de angel o' de Lawd passin' by," Uncle Pete said afterward—and behold! there was Mr. Marcellus fairly sobbing on Mr. Camillus' breast, and Mr. Camillus' stout arms flung around Mr. Marcellus' shoulder!

The Venable feud was at an end.

CHRISTMAS LONG AGO.

How the Festival was Celebrated Before the War.

Before the war Christmas was one day of all days, or rather a pastoral Saturnalia that sets dull care at defiance. From Christmas Day to Twelfth night—popularly known as "Old Christmas"—the only work done was that of charity or necessity. December was taken up with getting ready for the holidays. Axes rang merrily at every wood-side; wagons piled high with oak and hickory logs cut deep ruts in the soft plantation roads, and at last made them quagmires. Sometimes the wood-pile covered half an acre. Children, white and black took perilous rides on the long, pliant saplings projecting from each end. When it came to be cut into fire lengths there was fun indeed. The choppers raced one with another. On the big hickory back-logs they showed dark, perspiring silhouettes in half-rims of gleaming steel. So rapid were their motions that the eye quite lost the outline of axe and arm. That, of course, only through the race; but all day the big logs melted into fire-wood that was stacked and piled at the back and front doors. Wood sheds are unknown there, but the saddle-house was half filled with clean, new, sweet-smelling chips to kindle fires with if there came rain or snow. Picking them up was the children's part. When the saddle-house bank got higher than their small heads, they began to pile them in the kitchen, where black mammy was baking Christmas cake. Each basketful was worth a lump of sugar, not the tasteless white sugar of this era, but a generous bit as big as your fist from the heart of the hogshead of live, coarse-grained, brown sweetness that was not a month away from its native Louisiana plantation. Of course there was white sugar for frosting and so on.

All houses were open houses. The young folk went nightly from one to another to dance or play the old-fashioned ring games. When New Year's came the most pious people watched it in with hymns and prayers. Those not so pious danced the old year out and slept deeply into the morning of the new one. So time flew velvet-winged till Twelfth-night came. There was little fancing or play upon it, partly because of weariness, more because everybody wanted to be fresh for the 8th of January balls. "Jackson's Day" ranked with the Fourth of July. Whoso did not honor it was poor-spirited indeed. So cards and question games engaged the merry-makers until midnight struck. Then everybody scrambled after a lantern-bearer to the cow-pen, to find out whether or not cattle really did kneel upon old Christmas. Derision lay usually in the mind of the investigator. Believers in the tradition found the attitudes of the resting ruminants wonderfully devout. Infidels declared there could not be much worship in kneeling upon hams. The dispute was lively enough to keep all hands awake till they got home. The darkies never doubted. Indeed their faith in cow prayers was only equalled by their faith in the devil's mark on a hog. Inside the foreleg there are five small curious indentations that the negroes say show where the devils went in to possess them. If the holes get filled with foreign substance the animal pines and dies. At least plantation swine-herds would tell you so to a man. The race is, in fact, born to believe. Freedom and free schools have sadly cut down their Christmas, but faith in the miracle of the manger remains.

A Romance of Old Slavery Days.

[From the Louisville Post.]

A colored woman, bent nearly double with eighty years and a heavy bundle, was seen to board the Cincinnati mail line packet yesterday afternoon. Approaching the clerk of the boat she slowly untied a knot in the corner of her red bandanna handkerchief and produced enough cash to purchase a ticket for Cincinnati. The wrinkled and feeble old negress is the heroine of a romance.

In ante-bellum days she was a slave and was owned by a planter near Asheville, N. C. At an early age she was married to a slave of the same master. By him she had several children. Over half a century ago her husband was torn from her and her children and was sold to another planter. The woman continued to work on the North Carolina plantation, and in a short time was married again. Her whole family was then put on the block and sold to a Virginia man. When the emancipation proclamation was promulgated the family took advantage of their freedom and journeyed northward, finally taking up their home in Louisville. The husband died after the close of the war, and the children one by one left their mother to seek their fortunes.

The mother toiled and labored to make a livelihood. She heard nothing of her first husband until about a month ago, when one of her sons found that the old man was living at Newport, Ky. The old negress journeyed thither and found the husband of her youth. He had also been married a second time, and had several children by his second wife. The latter was dead, however, and the reunited couple decided to again live together. The woman returned to Louisville, disposed of her effects, and yesterday completed the romance of fifty years by returning to her husband.—Louisville Post.

A Negro's Keys to Heaven.

The Palatka (Fla.) Herald is in possession of a cane with quite a history. Last week Tom Goodyear, an old negro, aged about eighty-six years, died. In his death-bed was a common walking-stick, on the handle of which were two leather straps, to which were attached two keys—one large and the other small. The old negro carried the cane during the last twenty-five years of his life. He never went without it, and always proclaimed that the small key would open his way into the better world, and that the large key, should he not go to that desired land, would allow him to escape from the doors of that land which is hotter than this. But when Goodyear died he left the keys and stick by his side while his spirit departed to that undiscovered land. It matters not which place the good old colored man went, he will find the doors open for his reception.

A Camera in the Necktie.

[New York Sun.]

The latest thing in the photographic line is a camera concealed in the necktie now worn so much by women. The camera, which is very light and flat, is concealed beneath the tie, the lens forming a simulated scarf-pin. It contains six plates, about one and one-half inches square, and catches a subject at a distance of two or three feet. The shutter is set by turning the top button of the coat or waistcoat, and discharged by means of rubber tubing connected with a bulb carried in the pocket.

A DESPERATE FAILURE;

OR,

Why I Can't Write a Christmas Story

Every one knows the story of the man who drove the cab. Never heard it? Why, that's strange—passing strange. The whole thing about it was—he wasn't in it. And in exactly the same way have the reportorial staff of The Times been for the past week. I rejoice in the fact that I am one of them, but I was knocked all helter-skelter about a week ago. On that fatal day I received a note, written in the usual dashing style of its writer. The note was hung on my hook, and this instrument hangs with dignity besides the hooks of my brother reporters, and just above the head of the city editor.

The latter dignified individual, when he has anything important to communicate to the members of his staff, writes a note. He never tells you. He writes; sometimes on the back of an envelope, sometimes on a piece of pad paper, and sometimes on a piece of bad paper. No matter what the paper, though, he writes. Then it is placed on the hook, and from which the reporter is supposed to receive it. He generally does, too, for if he doesn't, the exquisite pleasure of "chasing an item" about midnight will be the result.

On the fatal day referred to above the note I received read: "You will please write a Xmas story. Let it be over a column." Me writing a Christmas story. Shades of Dickens and Poe. Me—a matter-of-fact reporter whose daily life is made up of police courts, law suits, divorce cases, prize fights, and Council reports—write a Christmas story. In the first place, I didn't know any. I have read them, years ago, but the memory of them are like some of the dreams of childhood. Where was the plot to come from? Of course I know several of the latter, but it was just my luck that none of them would fit for a Christmas tale.

My first plot ran something like this: I named my hero Vivian Mortimer, and my heroine Helen. This young lady would have been given a sur-name, but as my plot progressed I saw no occasion for it, so I did not burden my characters with appurtenances unnecessary. Vivian awoke Christmas morning and found that, like all well-regulated Christmases, the weather was snowy. He had been at the club the night before, and that institution has long held to the custom of having a large bowl of family egg-nog for the delectation of its members. His head aches with the usual dull, deadening pain, but resolution overcomes aches, and he arises. He dresses as is usual, eats a little, and goes to the club; not that he wanted any more of the seductive liquid of the night before, but he felt lonely.

In the second chapter he attends service at St. Paul's church, and while sitting in a front pew in the gallery suddenly becomes aware of the fact that two bright eyes are looking at him intently from a pew below. She smiles and gives a pleasing little nod of her head, while across his face flits an expression of both surprise and sadness. This young lady two years before had been loved by Vivian. Truly, honestly and nobly, she had been the only woman that had ever held the key to his heart, and one day her image entered never to leave. He told her of his love, and Helen loved him, but for coquetry's sake, if for nothing else, she took the matter into consideration. While doing so she had left the city, but during her stay in Washington she wrote a letter. In it was given all proper encouragement, and had Vivian received it he would have felt sure in his heart that Helen was his own.

But by some unlucky mischance that has done more to ruin families than almost anything else, the letter was never delivered. Vivian believed that she did not love him, having taken the matter in consideration only to save him the pain of a downright refusal. After the service Vivian meets Helen in the vestibule. He accompanies her home, but the conversation on the street is only that commonplace chit-chat that is used under such circumstances.

When home was reached, the usual query, "Why have you been so cruel?" is propounded by Vivian, and Helen says, in the usual tremolo voice, that she wrote a letter.

"Did you not get it?"

"No, I did not. What did it say?"

Her eyes in the usual way look at the pattern of the parlor carpet, and the usual red blush mounts her cheek without the aid of a step-ladder. There is the usual extension of arms, as can be seen at the cross-roads; the usual frou-frou of a gown; the usual kiss and the usual ecstacy. After this they take dinner with home people in the usual way, and spend the balance of the day in the usual "mussing up" of the girl's hair, and the usual rehearsing of the past. At night the usual good-night is said, and he departs.

I read the above to the "printer's devil." He said that it sounded "rather chestnutty," but if worked up by some one who knew how to write a Christmas story he thought it would do. I read it several times, and then agreed with him, and at once began to look around for another plot.

The next one was about Laura, who worked in a factory. Last July she rode home in a street car. When she entered, the vehicle was crowded. A young man gave her a seat. She thanked him. The car rolled on. Everybody got out but those two. He began a conversation. She answered him. The same week he called on her. Next week same thing. Keeps calling for a month. Declares his love. Is accepted, and the same week sent away by his firm. She reads telegram in newspaper. Railroad accident, and his name among the dead. Weeps copiously, and buys a black dress. Her face assumes a sad expression. Christmas morning comes. She thinks of the past. Weeps. The door-bell rings. He comes. Was not killed; was only knocked insensible. Kisses. He draws from his pocket a little box. It is the engagement ring. The usual ending.

I thought the "devil" did not have due appreciation of genius as a writer, so I read this to the press-boy. He said he thought it too sad, and that it was also impossible. That if the fellow had not died he would have written to the girl.

"That's so," I replied. I hadn't thought of that, and, as a consequence, story number two was decided unfit for use.

The next plot and story read something like as follows: The snow was falling with its usual gusto without, and Fitz Bejames was getting his best licks in on the telegraph instrument before him. Presently the receiver announced that Lynchburg wanted Richmond, and he hastened to reply. 'Twas past midnight, and the sleepy messenger boys were thinking of the joys of the morrow—Christmas day. Bejames began to receive the message, which was as follows: "Bob died at noon to-day. Will come down on Chesapeake and Ohio train to-morrow. George." It was addressed to Mr. Robbert H. Manning, 1326 west Franklin street. How sad, the operator thought, that Bob should die, and thus darken what he supposed to be a happy household. The messenger departed with the message, and the operator received another message addressed to himself. It was from his old friend John Jerbey, in Louisa, and said that he "would be down on the Chesapeake and Ohio morning train to spend the day. Meet me."

The morning came, and Bejames went to the station. Only one other individual occupied the waiting-room. It was Mr. Manning, whom Bejames knew by sight.

The train came in, and Bejames followed Manning to the cars. The man who had signed himself George got off. "So Bob is dead. Yes, poor fellow, and he would have made it in 2:28 next year if he hadn't died."

I read this to the office boy. He said that it was a shame to fool people so, and for a third time I threw away a plot.

The next plot was really a wonderful piece of work. It told of a poor newsboy who sold evening contemporaries. The story started off something like this:

"'Twas Christmas-eve night. The white, fluffy flakes had been falling all day, and as the lights now shone upon them in their downward flight they glistened with the glis of a Tiffany diamond. The store windows of Broad and Main street blazed out effulgently, and the hurrying crowd told the same old story of joy and happiness, poverty and wealth.

"It had been an unlucky day for poor little Johnny, the newsboy. People on the streets did not seem to feel the same interest in the Parnell case or the doings of Congress. Other thoughts entered their minds and mouths, and the evening paper was not in it.

"Johnny had worked hard. He had accosted every one passing. He had jumped on the street cars even at the risk of his poor little life, but business was bad—very bad—and as Johnny thought of his brothers and sisters and mother at home he wondered how it was that he could not get enough money to buy a small turkey. He wished he was bigger; that he had a store full of Christmas goods, and could go about his establishment seeing his clerks take in the money. But he had not, and as he pondered he sold a paper.

"The third one that day, and just as he pocketed the money a young man came up to him."

The note written by the city editor was placed on my book Monday morning, and just as I wrote the words, "Came up to him," the clocks and bells of the city registered Monday night at midnight. It was last Monday, and as midnight came another note was placed on my hook. It read: "You will please get a report of the midnight meeting of the street car-men. They meet to-night."

'Twas cold—everlastingly cold—but when news is to be gotten Christmas stories are not in it. Consequently, I went up to Lee Camp Hall, and for the next three hours I walked the sidewalk and "iceified" my feet.

The Christmas story business was knocked out of me, and I have given up the effort in desperate despair. I cannot write a Christmas story for many reasons, but the best one is—that I cannot do it.

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Saturday, Dec. 27, 1890,

the property described in said deed, as follows: All that parcel of land lying and being in the town of West Point, Va., known as the "Beach Lot," with the exception of so much of said lot as was conveyed by the Richmond and West Point Land, Navigation and Improvement Company to Thomas B. Henley, with Terminal Hotel.

This property lies below First street, part thereof on the west side of D street, and balance on the east of E street.

TERMS: Cash sufficient to pay the expenses of executing this trust, the fees for drawing and recording the aforesaid deed of trust, if still unpaid, and to discharge the amount of money due and payable to the parties secured under said deed, and if there be any residue of said purchase money the same shall be made payable at such time and secured in such manner as the said Thomas B Henley, his executors, administrators or assigns shall direct.

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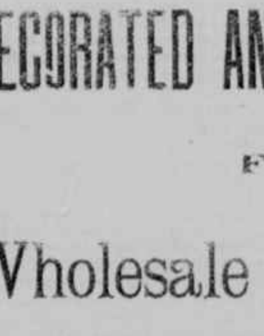

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