LOST! DECEMBER 25TH.

WRITTEN FOR THE MORNING CALL BY OCTAVE THANET.

CHAPTER I.

MISS CELIA WILDER did not stop at the public library, as her custom was, on her way up the hill; yet she had intended to stop. Though it was the day before Christmas and Miss Celia was loaded with bundles she still had enough loose silver left in her pocket to pay her passage in the electric car that creaked and whirred up the hill past her—a red blurr in the winter dusk—crammed like a beehive. However, she would not ride, she would walk and go into the library for the "Crime of Sylvestre Bonard," to be finished and left there for her to-day by Mrs. Rollins.

Indeed, she did walk as far as the library and paused outside the door. The library is a thin, high brick building, with an unhappy accident of a tower on one side, but Miss Celia admired it because her father had given it to the town. She looked now with a sentiment approaching to fondness on the great oaken doors and the little shops which flared in front. One shop was a milliner's and the other a confectioner's, and in the latter window was a glitter of iced cakes and sugar forms, all under the eye of a Santa Claus uprearing a Christmas-tree.

Had there not been this window Miss Celia would have gone in for her book; be-

cause but for this window a little girl of 3, in the daintiest furred long coat, with a mop of spun-gold rings tumbled over the gray fur and blue cloth, would not have stopped to admire its splendors, and the patient Swede girl with her would not have coaxed her in vain.

Miss Celia looked at the child with a friendly smile. Spinster as she is, who has passed more than one birthday in the forties, there is no living woman with a warmer heart for children. Besides had she not her own little boy waiting for her at home? Poor Eliza's child left to her with Eliza's diamonds and a pretty legacy, five years ago.

Eliza was the beauty of the Wilder family, Celia's own sister. She had been married in Washington—when General Wilder was in Congress—to a rich New Yorker with weak lungs, who could not live at home. There Eliza held court for more than ten years, not forgetful of her sister, who visited her regularly every winter. Then came a last sad winter. Eliza and her husband died within four months of each other, and the poor little rich boy was left to his aunt. It was six years ago. Rex was only a baby; and the wrench and shock had somehow been outlived, for "the strong years conquer us," but Celia's faithful heart often ached yet. She had taken the pretty, delicate little creature and reared him with much love and some tears lest she should miss the best course for a boy. If only her father had lived! Celia believed her father the noblest of men and a great statesman. She had been his friend, his confidant, his private Secretary, and his never faltering worshiper. For his sake, she who had been a handsome girl and was a distinguished looking woman, had never married, in spite of many lovers.

After his death she lived alone in the old house that her father had left her, and dined with the family portraits until Rex came.

Remembering Rex now, she smiled again on the little girl, saying in her gentle, high-bred voice:

"Do you want something in here, dearie?"

"I want to do in and talk to Santa Claus," said the little lady very composedly. "My mamma did talk to Santa Claus one day in a store."

"Sie must go home," the maid interposed, "we must take car, Mrs. Brace, Sie not like it."

Miss Wilder's face changed at the name; and her hand dropped off the little shoulder. She said coldly that a car was coming and without making any further remark, turned and went up the hill, too absorbed in some sudden thought to remember her book, or even to notice Mrs. Rollins, who had come up puffing a little with "The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard."

Mrs. Rollins was a little, plump, white woman, with pretty toilets and a lisp. She appeared a soft, timid, and possibly silly dove; but she was sufficiently acute. The Rev. Thaddeus Graves Rollins, her husband, was rector of the parish to which Miss Wilder liberally subscribed. She went every Sunday, twice a day to church, she attended the week day services in Lent; but she did not belong to the church. Why? That was what Mrs. Rollins was telling Mrs. Dubarry, the librarian, while Miss Celia tramped more and more swiftly up the hill.

"She hurried off so quick that I couldn't make her hear," said Mrs. Rollins between pants, loosening her seal-skin.

"Why, I saw her talking to Mrs. Brace's little girl only a minute ago," said Mrs. Dubarry, a stranger in the place; a reserved dark woman who had known enough hardship and turmoil to be thankful for this quiet harbor.

"Ah, that was it, Betty" (Mrs. Dubarry was an old friend of the rector's wife). I do believe she didn't know and then somebody told her."

"Know what, Janet?"

"Know her own niece. That child is Miss Wilder's niece."

"Why shouldn't she know her?"

"Well, it is a longish story, and the placard says, 'Do not talk,' you know."

"Oh, certainly; perhaps we would better not," said Mrs. Dubarry timidly, with a thought for the Board of Trustees and the mites at home, and how much the salary meant to her.

"There's nobody here," said Mrs. Rollins, who stood in less awe of the Trustees, knowing them better. "I think here is about the only place that isn't crowded. Well, you might as well know, Betty, because otherwise, Miss Celia being here so much and all, you might put your foot in it with a stray question. It is this way. You know Miss Celia's father was General Wilder. He had a regiment in the war and was breveted General, and was our member of Congress until he died; would have been our Senator if he had lived. Miss Celia thought him the greatest man on earth. Well, General Wilder had two wives. It is to be supposed that he got along comfortably with the first one (Celia's mother). She died when Celia was fifteen, and he married again, which, I have been told, Celia took very hard. Whether it was her stepmother's fault or her's they were not happy. The stepmother was a handsome creature, very gay and fond of admiration. The husband was absorbed in politics; he was used to his daughter's sympathy and to being considered a demigod. His wife didn't bow down and worship him as he was accustomed to be treated; she was waiting to be worshiped herself. The result was they quarreled. There was one child, a girl. She was 10 years old and Celia about 28 when the crash came, and the pair separated—exactly why nobody knows, but there was plenty of gossip. The little girl went with her mother, and from that day to this Celio has never had a word to say to her sister."

"But don't you think that hard?" said Mrs. Dubarry. "You know the child naturally would cling to its mother."

"Oh, that wasn't the whole story. As the girl grew up her father wanted to see her, and she sided with her mother and wouldn't see him, and it was very horrid indeed. They do say that he sent for her when he was dying and she wouldn't come. I don't know."

"Did he leave her any property?" said Mrs. Dubarry, who, poor soul, was so poor that she could not help considering money any more than she could help breathing.

"Yes, that was the odd part of it. He left her almost as much as he left Celia."

"And she is rich?"

"Why, I suppose Celia must have two hundred thousand."

"What became of the mother?"

"She went to Europe."

"And the daughter?"

"She married, too, and has come here to live. You know her; it is Mr. Brace."

"And that was her daughter?"

"Yes, her only child. It does seem a wicked thing for two sisters to be living within a stone's throw of each other and never speaking."

"And if they meet, what do they do?"

"Nothing; pass each other like strangers. Once they were together at a church sociable, and some one tried to introduce them."

"Mercy! What did they do?"

"Miss Celia drew herself up and said: 'I must decline to know Mrs. Brace'—like that, and turned on her heel, while Mrs. Brace went all sorts of colors. I was told that she was willing to be introduced, but Celia is obstinate. You've heard about her wanting to join the church—no, of course you haven't. Well, she did, and came to Tad about it, and he told her that she must first become reconciled to her sister."

"Was she willing?"

"No; she wouldn't join the church. I was afraid she would go to the cathedral, or even to some other denomination. I wanted Tad to be a little kind to her; but you know what he is about—what he calls matters of principle. No; he wouldn't yield a jot—quoted things out of the Bible. Well, he was right; but I can't look at things quite so independently. And she gives $300 a year. But she made no difference at all: went to church and subscribed just the same. Why, Betty it is half-past 5—time for us both to go."

Long before they went Miss Celia had climbed the little space between the library building and her house. The house was a large square house, the roof of which for an apex had a cupola. In front of the house was a wide veranda, and it was set far back in a deep lawn and old-fashioned garden, where the chrysanthemums were only a little done blooming. By now the lone hill before her, the short hill behind her, straightened into business streets, were pricked out in yellow and white sparks of light. The great electric tower had a white blaze with radiating bristles, like a weird porcupine. The snow was crisp under her tread. Just as she came opposite the church the chimes broke forth.

Sweet and keen the notes pealed through the air:

God bless, you merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ, our Savior
Was born on Christmas day.

Years and years ago, when the sister whom she had taught herself to hate, was a little, innocent baby no bigger than her own little girl, Celia had sung that carol to her, and told her about Santa Claus. Yes, she had taken her into a shop once to see a great figure. Likely enough it was to that story the child alluded.

"To think of her coming here to live just when I was getting settled and comfortable," thought Celia bitterly, and making no account of Mr. Brace's business.

She recalled with a sick heart all the miserable times under her father's roof; a thousand petty squabbles, the venomous fashion in which her stepmother poisoned the child's heart against her, the neglect of the house and her own pitiful efforts to keep the surface smooth, so that her father might not be worried; her father's ghastly face, the agony of the end; the dragging, degrading torment of it all.

"She is her mother's own daughter, and I never will forgive her!" she vowed. She vowed is all the more earnestly that she felt herself shaken by the sight of the little face, so like the little face that she once had loved.

It was relief to reach her own gate, her own door. She went in. The fire was blazing in the open fireplace; the old-fashioned red plush and damask of the chairs; the pretty furnishings, the etchings on the walls and the Detaille that poor Eliza left her, how friendly and bright they looked coming out of the dark chill!

Reggy, and Maddox, his nurse, had their heads close together over a table and a sheet of paper. Maddox folded the paper just as Miss Wilder entered.

"And it must be put up the chimney, Maddox," says Master Reggy, very earnestly. "You might address it to Santa Claus, care of the chimney, you know."

Maddox, in the most matter-of-fact way, would have thrown the note in the fire, but Celia arrested her.

"I'll put it up the chimney for you, dear," said she.

She was glad to get off her street dress. She always dressed for her late dinner. Like the dinner, the soft black silks that she wore were a relic of the old Washington state.

When she came down she sat in the great carved arm-chair and let Reggy crumple her pretty dark hair and pull her little ears (a funny caress of him) at his lordship's pleasure. Half-dreamily she enjoyed his affection and the music of his small, rippling voice.

Suddenly, without warning: "Aunty, Maddox says I can't never have a little sister," said Reggy: "can't I?"

"Why, no, Reggy"—rather startled—"I suppose not." Then she sighed and stroked his brown curls. "You know you have two little sisters in heaven."

Master Reggy squirmed and kicked the chair, as he exploded: "I don't care for them! they ain't no company for me; I want a little sister that can play ball and 'lectric cars with me, like Gracie Brace!"

"Gracie Brace!" cried his aunt, almost pushing him from her, "when did you ever see Gracie Brace?"

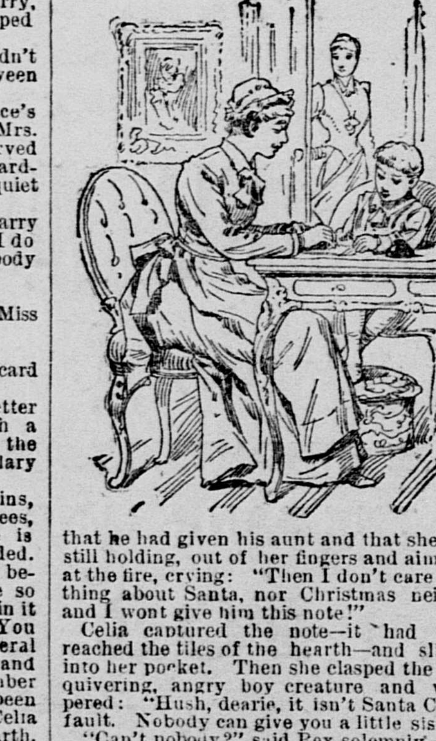
"Why, I've seen her lots and lots of times—anyway four times; and I've played in her yard."

Miss Celia gasped. She did not answer Rex. She could not. This must be stopped; but over the best way to stop it she must needs meditate. So silent, and knitting her long slim fingers, Celia frowned at the fire.

Rex went on with his thoughts. "Aunty, can't Santa Claus give me a sister for Christmas. I'd rather have a sister than a donkey."

"No, Rex dear; neither Santa Claus nor any one can give you a sister."

Rex looked at her. He had never known his aunt to deceive him. His little lip twitched, the tears gathered in his wide brown eyes. In a childish gust of passion like a flash he tore the crumpled little note



that he had given his aunt and that she was still holding, out of her fingers and aimed it at the fire, crying: "Then I don't care anything about Santa, nor Christmas neither, and I wont give him this note!"

Celia captured the note—it had only reached the tiles of the hearth—and slid it into her pocket. Then she clasped the little quivering, angry boy creature and whispered: "Hush, dearie, it isn't Santa Claus' fault. Nobody can give you a little sister."

"Can't nobody?" said Rex solemnly.

"Nobody, dearie."

"But God can, can't he?"

It was one of those logical avalanches that children are always pulling down on our heads. Miss Celia crawled out with the usual craven evasion: "Reggy, it would be a miracle, and there are no miracles nowadays."

"What's a miracle?"—busy with his aunt's ear and twisting it till it hurt her—"and why can't they have 'em nowadays?"

More craven evasion from Miss Celia. "Reggy, dear, you are too little to understand; when you get older I will tell you."

"Tell it to me so I can understand, like you did 'bout the 'lectric cars."

"I can't," said Miss Celia, truthfully. But he was so woeful in his disappointment and perplexity that she did not abandon the subject, like a wise woman, but parleyed with him and tangled herself up in explanations and futile consolations, to the effect that little sisters did not come grown up and able to play; but, at first, were unpleasant red babies who could do nothing but cry.

Rex brought the consolation up with a round turn, exclaiming: "No, aunty, that isn't always so. Willy Durham has got a little new sister; he has only had her a month; his mamma got her in Chicago, at Field's, I guess, 'cause I heard her tell you yesterday: 'You can get everything at Field's now,' and she's four years old, and rides on a tricycle."

"But, my dear, she is a little adopted sister."

"Oh!" Reggy had a way of letting out a single, abrupt, bitten off "Oh!" when his mind was working; it was like a puff of steam from an engine, sure to have results, soon. Presently he spoke again, very slowly. "Aunty, I 'spose 'dopted sisters are the big ones. I'd rather have a 'dopted sister, I think. Do you have to buy 'dopted sisters at Field's?"

Rashly Miss Celia answered that you could take any little girl that you liked whose parents or guardians would let you have her.

Reggy said "Oh!" and said not another word on the subject. But when he came to his prayers at night (such a quiet, good little boy as he was all through dinner and the evening!) he added an original postscript: "Please God give Reggy a little 'dopted sister, that can ride on a donkey!"

Miss Celia made no comment. It was one of the times when she felt how hard it was to decide on the right course for a boy.

Downstairs she took out Reggy's note to Santa Claus. On a very smudgy and crumpled sheet of paper was written:

Dear Santa Claus: I want a little sister and a donkey and a little cart, and a type-writer like Maddox's niece plays on at the office. My aunty wants a good little boy, maybe I will do. Henry Feretzle wants a fur cape to keep him warm when he drives aunty. Teena wants an easier place where they have dinner in the middle of the day, but I guess she was mad when she said that so you don't need to mind, but she truly wants a photograph album. Mrs. Feretzle wants a tea-kettle, the cover has come off of hers and she don't know any English so she can't buy one downtown, but you can talk Swedish, can't you? And I want a little sister most of all. Maddox wants a good little boy, too, like aunty. Lizzie, our second girl, that never saw Santa Claus, wants a new cap and an umbrella, and please don't forget I want a little sister. Maddox writes this, but I write my name myself. (Below in Reggy's cramped little hand was: I love you Santy Clos.) REGGY.

"Poor little pet lamb!" said Miss Wilder tenderly, "I hope he will forget about the sister and be content with the donkey and the typewriter his uncle has sent him. Now the other things—I believe I have everything except the teapot. How like Maddox to never say a word for herself. I hope she'll like her dress." Thus thinking, she called Maddox to consult with her about the tea-kettle.

Generally, Maddox (from long and careful "knowing her place") looked no more expressive than the wooden woman who comes out to announce pleasant weather in some toy barometers, but to-night there was a dab of red on each cheek and a queer, flickering brightness in her pale eyes.

"Miss Celia, I was coming to tell you," she began in her ordinary voice, but her hands were plucking at her apron, "there is some—news!"

"News!" repeated Miss Celia, while her heart went seeking timorously for possible loss or sorrow; for this is the cruel ghost of affliction that we shall ever afterward be afraid.

"I have been doing what 'tis like you wont approve, Miss Celia," Maddox continued, stolidly. "I know Mrs. Brace's nurse-girl. I knew her before she went to Mrs. Brace, she being Mrs. Feretzle's sister, and so she sometimes comes here of an evening. And she was here this evening. And I let her talk about her mistress."

"That was wrong, Maddox," said Miss Celia, with dry lips.

"Yes, ma'am, but the subject came up unbeknownst to me. She says Mrs. Brace is a very kind lady."

Miss Celia only lifted her hand.

"That ain't it, Miss Celia. Mrs. Brace is in mourning now and—it's for her mother, Miss Celia."

Dead! A wicked woman Celia believed her; but her sins were gone to that solemn audit where the cleanest of souls must need mercy.

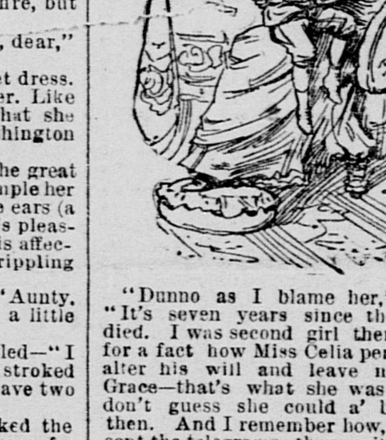
"God forgive her!" said Celia.

"Yes, ma'am," said Maddox, in all sincerity. "She died very suddenly, in Paris, a month ago come to-morrow. You know she was married again, Miss Celia, to a French gentleman; so they buried her there, and sent all her papers and things to Mrs. Brace, and Elna says there is something in these papers about you, and she thinks Mrs. Brace wants to make friends—"

The red crept into Celia's cheek; she drew up her slim figure haughtily. You see it is an easy thing to forgive the dead—the living are another matter.

"I wish Mrs. Brace no harm," said Celia, in a clear tone, "but our paths lie apart. She chose it when she would not come to our father on his death-bed. But that is not why I sent for you, Maddox."

Maddox told Teena she felt herself "fair snapped in two."



"Dunno as I blame her," said Teena. "It's seven years since the old General died. I was second girl then, and I know for a fact how Miss Celia persuaded him to alter his will and leave money to Miss Grace—that's what she was then. Well, I don't guess she could a' been more'n 17 then. And I remember how, after they had sent the telegrams, they waited and waited; and the General made Miss Celia get out the papers and find out about trains. It was only from Chicago, for they were there then. And he'd keep asking the time, saying, 'Do you think she'll come this time, daughter?' He did it till the hour before he died, for Miss Celia never showed him the telegram she got."

"Yes, I remember," said Maddox, who had heard the story plenty of times before. But it was the first time for Lizzie, the other auditor, who was curious. "Didn't Miss Celia ever show the telegram?" said she.

"No, but I know. I knew the telegraph man, and he told me. It said, 'I cannot come,' and not another word."

"So he died," said Lizzie in an awe-struck voice, "and without seeing her? Goodness me!"

"Yes; but the last words he said before he fell asleep, and he never rightly did wake up from that sleep, was to give little Gracie his love. He was sorter wandering then, and kept thinking she was just a little thing."

"And did Miss Celia give her his love?"

"You better b'lieve she didn't," said Teena energetically; "nor me neither if I'd been in her place. And I don't blame her if she never speaks a mortal word to her."

"But she was so young," urged the more merciful Maddox; "and you and I know, Teena, that young girls is awful fools."

So the philosophers in the kitchen discussed her tragedy, while alone, over the gray ashes of the fire, Miss Celia watched all night through with her memories.

She went back step by step through the quarrels. Did they look so unpardonable now that the slight creature that had caused them was past all mischief-making in her grave?

Vain, selfish, ignorant, playing with a grave man's honor as if it were tinsel, taking to hysterics and her bed whenever her husband refused her anything, flying into tropical rages and equally tropical remorses, frantically jealous of little Grace's affection for her sister, and utterly reckless in her wiles to win the child, yet generous, devoted to Grace, a creature without conscience, surely, but not without a heart. "I never liked her—I could not like her anywhere," said Celia honestly, "but I might have been kinder to her."

And even the end did not seem so inconceivably black as before. What could this brilliant little creole, who never could keep the principles of the two parties distinct, know about public honesty or public honor? She took the tremendous bribe offered her quite complacently until she perceived her husband's horror. And he—he extricated his wife at the expense of his own stainless reputation. He saved her—and never forgave her.

Neither had Celia forgiven her until now. But Grace—Grace was different. If she was her mother's daughter, so, too, was she her father's, with his very eyes and smile, his very courage Celia knew well (for do you suppose she had not listened eagerly to the talk about her sister?—listened, looking the other way and not seeming to hear), his honor and his pride.

The chimes were ringing again:

Star of wonder, star of might,
Star of glorious beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to the perfect light.

Miss Celia knelt down, sobbing: "I can't feel it is right to forgive her. I can't! I can't!

CHAPTER II.

Reggy's donkey and cart were waiting for him in the morning; so was his miniature type-writer, as well as a gaudy company of books and toys; and, in the first rapture of his riches, he seemed to have forgotten any other desire.

It is true there was one dampening moment when he stood searching every corner of the room, in a single, blank, solemn glance. But it was only a moment; he said not a word; and then he was off for his donkey, howling and skipping with joy.

Miss Celia (who looked pale, though smiling), went away to church, quite relieved about him. Privately, I think Miss Celia would have given a pretty penny to the poor box could she thus have purchased leave to stay at home. She dreaded the leisure to think, the music with its memories, the softening influences of the season. Miss Celia did not want to be softened, she wanted to be hardened. But there would be the talk if such a regular attendant stayed away, and there were the Rollinses invited to dinner. Miss Celia donned her black velvet gown and fastened her laces with her diamond brooch and put a large white silk handkerchief over them under her pelisse, and Maddox tied her bonnet-strings and gave her a new pair of gloves out of the sachet; and she went to church.

How much or how little the service and the sermon did for Miss Celia's soul, I cannot say; but I know that she fixed her mind sternly on certain worldly subjects (for instance, Reggy's Kindergarten) and heard as little as Dr. Rollins' melodious and magnetic voice would let her about "the greatest of these."

The Rollinses were late in joining her in the vestibule; the reason for which instantly appeared, in spite of Mrs. Rollins' warning elbow.

"You must excuse us, Miss Wilder," said the rector, "the fact is Mrs. Dubarry was just telling us Mrs. Brace's little girl has been kidnaped—" Here, aware of the elbow, he turned his mild, inquiring countenance on his wife.

She certainly was not so conscientious as he, for she asked him if he was not on her skirt, which he was nowhere near, and then took the kidnaping business out of his hands.

"If she has any heart at all," thought Mrs. Rollins, "she'll want to hear about a kidnaped child! "Yes, Miss Wilder (aloud), isn't it awful! It is the most mysterious thing, too. Her father was walking up and down the hill with her—just to let her try her new tricycle—and almost opposite their own drive, you know how the hills slope up on that side the street, and how far back the house is, so you can see it from the sidewalk—well, do you know? the little thing wanted to run home, a minute, to get something or other to show a playmate that she saw; my dear, she ran up that asphalt drive, with her father watching her, and into the shadow of the stone porch—you know how dark it is with those heavy pillars and the arch and all; she ran there—and that was the last seen of her!"

"I don't understand," said Miss Celia; "shan't we walk on?"

They walked on, Dr. Rollins, in his turn explaining.

"Mr. Brace, of course, thought the child was safe. In the house they supposed she was with him. He met—well, Miss Wilder it was I whom he met, and we chatted together pleasantly. He is a very cultivated, noble young fellow, Mr. Brace," (Dr. Rollins could not resist the opportunity), "and not a bit spoiled by his money; I like to talk to him. After he left me he returned to the house, and then, for the first time, discovered that the child was missing. No one had seen her since she left with her father. There was instant search and inquiry. Nothing was found. Only as nearly as they could calculate at the time of Gracie's disappearance, a veiled woman in a long cloak was hanging about the yard."

"I don't believe she took the child," said Mrs. Rollins; "people don't rig themselves up in striking clothes when they are going to kidnap babies."

Miss Celia asked no questions, but inwardly she was in a flame. Had it been any other woman in the town she would have sent Feretzle with proffers of sympathy and aid; now she was silent; she let the talk flow over her as a rock does not resist high tide.

At dinner the very servants were agitated. She could catch whispers in the butler's pantry. Elna, the Swedish nurse-maid, had stopped at the kitchen in passing, to tell her story of grief and frantic search. The police were scouring the town and the two towns across the river. Every house in the neighborhood had been visited, every foot of the Braces' house and stable searched. While they sat at table, with the flowers and light, they could hear the crier shouting a description of the lost child, and presently they saw a boy run by over the snow, with his arms heaped with posters.

Dr. Rollins said: "That is the boy from the printing-office with the offer of the reward. Five hundred dollars offered. They will be pasted all over the city before nightfall." He had just returned from searching, having parted from the ladies at Miss Celia's gate. He was agitated and could talk of nothing else. Both the Rollins boys had remained to help, though what they could do was vague enough.

Even Henry Feretzle had gone; having presented himself to his mistress and asked to go with Elna "to look."

All the time they could see people passing, women as well as men, talking eagerly. The suspicious woman had been arrested, protesting that she was only a member of the Salvation Army, and showing some lurid tracts in evidence; but she had been taken to jail, where at last accounts she was exhorting the prisoners.

Miss Celia wished that Dr. Rollins would not describe the tearless anguish of the mother, "Who yet thinks of every one," he said, with moist eyes, "ran after the nurse-girl with a shawl, made her husband take a cup of coffee—and all the time keeps her senses in the midst of the confusion."

Celia felt her heart contract. She remembered her father in emergencies—so he used to act—this was his true daughter.

Insensibly she felt her stony control giving way under the tide of sympathy. She asked questions: "Who was the playmate that Grace thought she saw?" "Couldn't they discover something from him?"

"I believe there is a chance there," cried Mrs. Rollins. "Wouldn't Reggy know? Where is he?"

Now Reggy had behaved very queerly. He had been keen to sit at the table with his aunty up to that very day; yet immediately before dinner he had sidled up to whisper that he didn't want to go to the table; he wanted to stay out with his donkey. He so carefully avoided giving his aunt a rear view of his small person that she suspected some grievous mishap to his best clothes—suspicions that grazed certainty during dinner when she heard Teena's voice uplifted wrathfully through the slide.

"I shouldn't wonder if he has sat down in the pudding," thought Miss Celia.

Never was such a tumultuous dinner known in that well-ordered household; the immaculate Maddox forgetting her cap; Lizzie trying to pour champagne out of a corked bottle, sounds of wreck and crash twice emerging from the kitchen.

Ordinarily Miss Celia's decorous soul would have writhed at such service; now she hardly noticed it. Her whole being was shaken by distracting emotions—pity, anxiety, clinging resentment, long-silent instincts of kinship, and strong and stronger all the time a frightened tenderness for the little helpless innocent child, her very own little niece. Perhaps this minute she was shivering in some ghastly hovel!

Something rose in her throat to choke her; she could not eat; the wine that she drank feverishly might have been water.

When Mrs. Rollins proposed questioning Reggy it was as is the strained cords snapped; neither pride nor anger could hold her heart in their leash any longer.

"Yes, Mrs. Rollins," she said, lifting her head with a look on her faded and delicate

features strangely like the expression of the painted General above her, "let us have Reggy in. Please call him, Maddox. And then—I know our friends will excuse it—will you put on your things and be ready to go to Mrs. Brace's?" The Rollinses would not exchange glances, but Mrs. Rollins felt pale with excitement, and the rector cleared his throat.

The pause (while they waited for Reggy's appearance) was something painful.

Miss Celia kept her composure like a soldier. "I suppose Reggy is out with his donkey," said she, in precisely her usual voice, only it was pitched a key lower and had the effect in its distinct enunciation of being heard; "he is bewitched with the beast; I can't keep him away from the stable."

"But isn't it cold there?" said Mrs. Rollins, furtively glancing at the darkening street and thinking how cold it was for a little child.

She hardly heard Miss Celia's answer that the stable was heated. Miss Celia, herself, stumbled, stopped—"Maddox, where is Master Reggy?"

Maddox had entered alone. "If you please, Miss Celia," answered she with her English solemnity, "Master Reggy aint fit to come in here, he is that messed up from spilling the ice-cream on him."

"Never mind, fetch him in—you will kindly excuse accidents"; with her inextinguishable politeness, "tell Teena—"

A clamor outside, beginning with a plain bellow of rage from Master Reggy and dwindling into furious whispers, caught the words off her lips.

"I think," said Dr. Rollins, mildly, "that Teena is bringing in the little boy by force."

"Excuse me," said Miss Celia. She rose and went to the door; no farther, because in the hall Teena was dimly visible pulling Reggy by the arm, Reggy, meanwhile making splendid play with his legs, whimpering and defying in a breath: "I haven't got to mind you! I wont mind you! I never will run and tell the butcher man to stop for you again if you don't let me go! Please let me go—please—please! I'll be good—I'll be—"

"If you don't quit crying and kicking," says the relentless Teena, "they'll hear you in the dining-room and know you're a naughty boy."

"Teena, what is the matter?" says Miss Celia. "Reggy, what have you been doing to yourself?"

She may well ask—no wonder Reggy shrinks from society and the dining-room gas-light—the beautiful blue velvet front of him is besmeared with cream only partially removed by the dish-cloth.

"He's tipped the ice-cream over on himself from greediness, ma'am," says Teena severely, while the wretched Reggy hangs his head; "yes, Reggy, you know it. This here's the fourth time you've come in for things to eat. A whole plate of grapes, and the ginger and prunes and three saucers of ice-cream, I saw with my own eyes, and turkey and salad, and two of them paper cases with oysters! If Mrs. Feretzle wants to give a party when she knows the family's in affliction she ought to get her own victuals with her own money, I say! Yes, ma'am; he pulled the ice-cream over him, he did!"

"They weren't for Mrs. Feretzle," sobs Reggy.

"Who is it for, then?" says Miss Celia.

Reggy hangs his head in her gown; the answer comes in sobs—"It—it's—for—my—little 'dopted sister!"

Four women at once cried or screamed or groaned at him, Mrs. Rollins, Lizzie, Teena and Maddox (by this time all in the hall), and the one man said: "Boy! what do you mean?" But one woman caught the little fellow in her arms, a woman white as the spilled cream, saying very gently: "Reggy, never mind, dear, where is your little adopted sister?"

"She's over to Mrs. Feretzle's now," said Reggy, "'cause she got to crying for her mamma. But she's been all the morning in the stable with me and the donkey, and then I tooked her to Mrs. Feretzle's—and—and it was her dinner I was getting ready. But she feels bad and says she wants to go home; but maybe if I get her the typewriter she'll stay."

"And what is your sister's name, Reggy?" said Miss Celia.

"Why, Gracie Brace, of course," said the young pirate. "Santa Claus wouldn't give me any 'dopted sister, so I tooked her."

Not then, but afterward, they learned all about it—how Gracie had seen Reggy and run around the house to him, and been lured away to be his little sister and see his don-

key. The cart was in waiting, and he hid her under the robes and drove home unobserved.

Home they played in the stable, where there was no one but the horses to see them, and finally he carried her to Mrs. Feretzle, who was happily ignorant of all the commotion, having been out in the street when Elna and her husband started. She accepted her without question as a little visitor of Reggy's.

It was Reggy's simple theory that after a long time (and it seemed to him ages since they first visited the donkey) he might display his captive and coax his aunt to keep her. All this story came later. Then, there was only one impulse among the women which caught them up like a cyclone and swept them through the hall, over the lawn to the little cottage back of the stable.

Oh the sweet small face at the lighted window; with the homesick tears on the roseleaf cheeks; and oh, the sweet, small voice exclaiming "Mamma will tum pretty soon! Papa will tum pretty soon!"

I think half the witnesses were crying. They fell back and let Miss Celia take her. Thus Miss Celia met her niece again, but this time she lifted her in her arms and kissed her and sobbed inarticulate tendernesses in her ear.

"I suppose some one ought to telephone to her mother," suggested Dr. Rollins, in a meek voice.

"Yes," said Miss Celia. And still holding the child in her arms, she walked across the dark lawn back to the house and through the hall.

No one ventured to speak to her or to offer to help her with her burden.

She rang the bell and herself called Mrs. Brace. Then they heard her answer to an inaudible voice:

"It is I, Celia Wilder; Gracie is here."

With the word she lifted the little head to the trumpet mouth.

"Call, Gracie, call loud!" she whispered. "Call mamma!"

The sweet, high, little voice echoed through the hall, "Mamma, mamma, come and get Gracie!"

"The lamb!" cried Lizzie, weeping on one of the dinner napkins.

"Oh, Tad, think of her poor mother," Mrs. Rollins whispered in her husband's ear, "when she hears that!"

"And think of you being such a wicked boy, Reggy, as to kidnap her!" cried Teena, who always felt herself a sort of policeman of virtue.

At this Reggy, dazed before, by the rush of events and the inexplicable excitement of "grown people," recovered his power of defense.

"She's my little 'dopted sister," he proclaimed, "and I didn't kidnap her. She gived herself to me. Didn't you, Gracie?"

"Es," said Gracie, "but I want to do home to my mamma. My mamma will be lonesome. She won't have no little girl."

Gracie's mother was not long without her little girl. In an incredibly short time the door-bell rang and Maddox ushered in a rather short, stoutish young man, with an ugly, clever, attractive face and a tall, beautiful young woman, both of whom, for a little while, saw nothing in the hall but one tiny shape.

It was the father who spoke first. "And it is you whom we have to thank?" he said, holding out his hand to Miss Celia.

Mrs. Rollins caught her breath and gripped a fold of the doctor's long, clerical coat very hard; but, after all, there was nothing of a scene. Miss Celia took the proffered hand, saying: "No, it is I whom you must forgive, for the little lad is the kidnaper."

The real scene, if there was any scene, happened after the Rollinses were gone—and you may be sure Mrs. Rollins had the tact not to stay long.

The sisters, Gracie, Brace and the erring Reginald (whom they treated rather as if he had conferred a favor on them—so shamelessly, Teena thinks, does justice slip sometimes!) were all in the dining-room.

Miss Celia had insisted on the young people, who had eaten nothing all that frightful day, having an impromptu meal. Afterward Brace had tried to help the inevitable constraint by a few commonplaces.

"And these portraits?" said he. "I recognize General Wilder."

His wife's face made him pause; she had risen and gone up to the canvas and was standing before it. The tears slowly gathered in her eyes.

"Celia," said Brace, in a different tone, "there is one thing it is better to say. You do not understand that your sister has learned to love her father. Why, the poor child has hunted up every scrap about him; she has read all his speeches. Ever since —"

Celia pushed her chair back, standing before his, white and trembling, taller than he.

"No, Clarence," said his wife.

"Yes, I am going to tell, Grace," said he firmly, "Celia, Grace knew nothing about her father's sickness when she sent that telegram. Mme. de Ravillac persuaded her that her father wanted to get her into his power and had sent an invitation (she did not show the telegram) to her to come. They were to leave Chicago for New York and Europe the next day. At that time Grace believed all she was told about General Wilder."

"But my letter to her giving her my father's last message?" said Miss Celia. She put both hands on the chair to steady herself. Mrs. Brace hid her face and sobbed.

"My wife found that letter among her mother's papers," said Clarence Brace, gravely.

There was silence. The children looked on with awed, wondering eyes.

Then, "She is dead," said Celia. "God forgive her!" and in a bitter-sweet, strange moment she felt her sister's tears and kisses on her cheek.

Through walls and windows came the sharp clang of a bell and a hoarse shout, "Lost, December twenty-fifth—"

"Why, if they aren't crying, Gracie, still!" exclaimed Mrs. Brace, to whom it seemed quite miraculous that since her baby was safely found the whole town should not know it. "Do stop them, Clare."

"Yes," said Miss Celia, smiling through her tears, "You could have them cry, instead, 'Lost, December twenty-fifth, a family feud!'"

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The story for December 28th will be "The Unbreakable Doll Baby; or Pirre Pujol's Luck." A New Year's story by Adolphe Belot.

Arabi Pasha is slowly dying in Ceylon, the place of his lifelong exile. It has been suggested that an appeal be made to the British Government asking that some more fitting place be selected where the unhappy Arab chief can serve out his exile.

CHRISTMAS IN THE NAVY.

There's No Place Like Home, After All, on Christmas Day.

The Morning Watch—A Sailor's Breakfast. Church Service at Sea—The Routine of a Man-of-War—A Christmas Dinner.

DONG-DONG! Dong-dong! Four bells! Six o'clock on a winter's morning, and Christmas day has fairly begun for Jack, far out at sea.

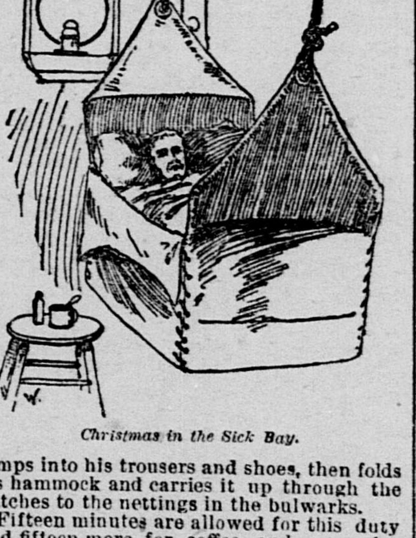
On the bridge the quartermaster at the wheel has no thought apparently beyond the compass in the lighted binnacle before him; the officer of the deck, in rubber coat and boots, stands beside him on the bridge, looking off through the gloom across the waste of heaving water, or giving a glance aloft now and then at the bellying sails, and again ahead at the lookouts by the bowsprit. The green and red lights in the starboard

CHRISTMAS DINNER ON THE DECK.

and port rigging shine bravely, and the masthead light sends a glimmer down to the deck, where the men on watch lie about in sheltered nooks and the sergeant of the guard walks to and fro with a semi-military swing that accommodates itself wonderfully well to the motion of the ship.

It is a cold gray morning; a sky dark with hurrying clouds, and the wind blowing in sharp gusts from the northeast, with a wicked promise of more before long, driving sleet and frozen spray full in your face and coating the stanch cruiser with ice from stem to stern.

The sound of the bell has scarcely died away when the clear notes of the buglecome swelling after, sounding the reveille. Then the gruff voices of the boatswain's mates call: "A-all ha-a-ands! Up all hammocks!" Everybody turns out—marines, apprentice boys, firemen, cooks, sailors—each man



Christmas in the Sick Bay.

jumps into his trousers and shoes, then folds his hammock and carries it up through the hatches to the nettings in the bulwarks.

Fifteen minutes are allowed for this duty and fifteen more for coffee and a smoke. Then all hands turn to and work until breakfast time, for a ship's routine never varies for a holiday. There are decks to scrub as usual, and before it is light enough even to turn off the electric circuit on the spar deck the pumps are working and Jack, with bucket and broom, is making his ship tidy for the day.

But it is a healthful exercise after all, and when the bos'n's pipe whistles "mess gear" at 7:50 in the morning, the sailor man has an appetite for breakfast. The meal, which is eaten at 8 o'clock, consists ordinarily of bacon, beans or mush, hard tack and black coffee. For Christmas fare the men have probably set apart some of their wages before leaving the last port, and if they have not been long out the mess may provide bacon and eggs this morning, condensed milk for the coffee and canned fruit of some kind.

At 8:45 "Sick call." Men who are under the surgeon's care report at the dispensary, and any case of sickness that has developed within the past twenty-four hours is accommodated in the sick-bay. All hands turn to now and work during the morning watch. The shining of guns, the hand-rails and brass fittings all over the ship must be polished, and there is many a job besides for a seaman's hands before the drum beats "Quarters" at 9:30. If the call were "General Quarters" the ship would be put into fighting trim. The marines, fully armed and equipped, would fall in; tackle would be rigged over the ammunition hatches for passing cartridges and shell up to the gun-deck; each gun crew would cast loose its piece, open the port and prepare the gun for action. Meanwhile rifles, revolvers and cutlasses would be seized from the racks and squads of men would be drilling in different parts of the deck.

The modern navy, with its scientific electrical and steam appliances, the breech-loading rifled cannon and revolving machine guns requires much more intelligence in its personnel than did the wooden frigates and line of battle ships thirty years ago. The men of our "white squadron" are young in years, but they are vastly superior in knowledge to the "grim sea dogs" who pulled a rope or stopped a ball in the days when ships fought yard arm to yard arm. Jack has learned to-day that the steel projectile is superior to the boarding pike. He has been taught to use his head as well as his hands, and he understands that in war efficiency in handling a Hotchkiss gun would be more valuable than skill with the cutlass. Apprentice boys on any of our cruisers can give a surprisingly accurate description of the armament. In the engine and furnace rooms there is the same familiarity with the dynamo, distilling apparatus, forced draught and other improvements in steam navigation that the sailor on the gun deck shows in explaining the hydraulic recoil buffer of the gravity gun carriage.

But this is Christmas morning, and at "quarters" the officers may substitute for

A Little Christmas Mending.

the arm or fire drills the simple service of the church. The men are mustered aft on the gun deck, and the chaplain, standing a little apart from the officers, at the foot of the companion hatch, reads the impressive ritual. Then he prays for the safety of the good ship and her crew and for the dear ones ashore. The sermon is a short one, but it goes home to every one before him; for he tells the simple story of the cross, of the Christ-child, borne earthward on that wondrous Christmastide, that has ebbed and flowed through 2000 years. The church service never seems more solemn than at sea. Jack may be rough and ready—aye, and reckless, too; he deliberately breaks a rule of the ship and is punished by a week in irons in the "brig"—but his heart is simple as a child's, and the chaplain's voice is to him only an echo of the message he hears in every wind that blows, the love and power of the God of sun and storm. There are traces of tears on many a bronzed cheek when the chaplain says "Amen."

A "mess" on shipboard consists of eighteen or twenty men who, for convenience, dine together. They have a cook and his assistant or "stricker." The "gear," consisting of plates, knives, forks, spoons, etc., are kept in wire-faced lockers on the lower deck; and at the order, "mess gear!" the cooks and strikers swing up the tables,

On the Bridge.

which consist of a single board, to hooks overhead, spread oil cloths over them and bring on the food. The men of each mess sit on benches ranged on either side of the table. The dinner on Christmas, like the breakfast, will depend entirely on the forethought of the men and the time that has elapsed since the ship left port. There may be fresh meat and vegetables, but the chances are all in favor of canned goods. Plain food and plenty of healthful exercise has made the sailor less exacting in the choice of a bill of fare than a landsman would be; and if this Christmas dinner includes plum duff, with wine sauce and oranges or apples, he is content.

At 1 o'clock the men on watch tumble up on deck and busy themselves about the ship, just as on other days. On the gun deck the men who have four hours "off" can employ their time as they please. Some do a little mending, for Jack is his own tailor; others read, look over their ditty-boxes, spin yarns or play cards. Nearly all are smoking. Banjos and a guitar are brought out, and to the rhythmic music of

DANCING THE HORNPIPE.

the tinkling strings a sailor lad is dancing a hornpipe. How his supple body swings with the swaying ship, as his flying feet mark the fantastic measure!—But hark! The bos'n's whistle, and the order: "A-all ha-a-nds reef tops'ls!" Up the ladders nimbly run the men, and scarcely are their heads above the hatch combings when the First Lieutenant sings out: "Reef tops'ls! Man the tops'l clewlines and buntlines, weather tops'l braces! Hands by the lee-braces, bowlines and halliards!" The men spring to their places at the ropes. "Clear away the bow-lines, round in the weather-braces; settle away the tops'l halliards! Clew down!" With a long pull, a strong pull and a pull altogether the yards swing round and lower to the caps. Then, "Haul out the reef tackles! Haul up the buntlines! Aloft, topmen!" Up the shrouds they go, hand over hand; they are in the tops. "Lay out! Take in two reefs!" Out on the icy yard they climb, grasping the frozen sail with their bare hands, hauling it over and tying it fast with the stiff reef-points. "Lay in!" back to the mast again, until the order, following quickly: "Lay down from aloft!" Then down the shrouds and backstays to the deck. Then the yards are trimmed and down the watch go again to make all snug below.

The wind is rising fast now. It has shifted a point more to the eastward and will soon blow a gale. Hatches are covered, ports closed, and every gun fastening inspected to see that the battery can by no chance get adrift during the storm. For there is no doubt now that, as Jack would say, "it is coming on to blow," and every precaution is taken to make the ship secure. The daylight of this wintry day has gone; the electric current is turned on again; in the smoking corner of the gun deck the officers are gathered, making themselves as comfortable as the violent rolling of the ship will permit; while forward the men were keeping as near the galley fires as possible.

If this Christmas story seems to neglect the ward-room and officers' mess, it is not from lack of appreciation. There is no better type of the American gentleman than a naval officer; but it is upon the brawny arm and loyal heart of Jack that the efficiency of the navy depends, and this holiday yarn shall be of him and his surroundings.

Supper is eaten at 5 o'clock. Then the gun-deck is swept down and everything is made snug for the night. The men off watch light their pipes again and many a reminiscence is exchanged of Christmas days in other seas and ports. There were holidays in the navy-yard, when the sailor had "shore leave" and improved every minute of it; days in the tropics, where a blazing sun shone down upon green palms, long stretches of white sand and a curling line of rollers breaking over coral reefs. Other days are remembered spent on board water-logged merchant ships and storm-swept pilot boats, and, rarest of all, a Christmas day at home with wife and little ones.

It is a wild night. The tramp of the watch across the deck and the rattle of blocks and tackle can be heard above the howling wind and the crash of waves that smite the cruiser's side with a force that sends the water in spurts through the closed gun ports. The ship rides the gale well, but she still carries too much sail; and the boatswain's whistle is heard again with the order: "A-all hands shorten sail!" On deck again; a pull at lines and braces; and up into the blackness go the topmen. Every stitch of canvass is taken in this time, and in a darkness so intense that the men cannot see each other on the yard. It is bitterly cold, too, and when the Lieutenant's trumpet sounds the welcome order, "Lay in!" they do it with a will. On such a night as this many a topman has lost control of his fingers and tumbled into the sea beyond help.

The cruiser, under bare poles, rides easier now. Nine o'clock comes. And at the stroke of two bells the bugle sounds tattoo; taps follow; hammocks are slung on the gun deck; and Jack can sleep again. Chrismas for him has come and gone; and ten to one every sailor-man in those long rows of swinging hammocks takes a trip home before he goes to sleep. There is no place like home at Christmas! C. HILLS WARREN.

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MY MORNING STAR AT CHRISTMAS.

Written for THE MORNING CALL.

THERE is a star in vault of heaven
That shines and smiles o'er land and sea,
So clear and tranquil, ever beaming,
And well I know it shines for me,
Tho' all the world may see its brightness,
Tho' it be set among the spheres
To ever sing in endless rhythm
The harmonies of countless years.
When this our globe but spun in atoms
Around the central burning sun,
Full well I know my star was lending
Its rays to light the course begun;
So when from Chaos forth came Nature,
And Nature's fairest child, the Earth,
My star still shone thro' thousand ages
And watched the generations' birth.
Tho' other spheres have shot from heaven,
With fires extinct, to depths of night,
And newer worlds have erewhile risen,
And wand'ring planets come to light,
My star, unchanged, still sends its gleaming,
And shines and smiles as when at first
With hosts supernal beamed its welcome
When this young Earth, an orb, outburst.
Tho' myriad cycles have swept o'er it,
Tho' old the song Creation sung,
From out its path, unchanged, unchanging,
It shines and smiles as ever young.

O, Star of Morning! now down-looking
On one so lowly 'neath thy ray,
Two thousand years ago thy beaming
As worship fell o'er him who lay
Within the manger, newly breathing
This mortal air of earthly chill,
The Babe whose age had no beginning,
Who was when thou wert nothing still.
Now soon again the day is coming,
The blessed day when He was born,
And thou wilt still be shining, smiling,
My Star of Peace, my Star of Morn!

And now I see thee in the heavens,
And know thee set beneath His feet,
Yet still I love to deem, while musing,
Thou art my star, my guardian sweet.
O, give me strength from thy strong nature,
O, give me calm from thy calm ray,
And thus, serene, O, lead me upward,
My star that shines for me alway.

December, 1890. JULIA CLINTON JONES.

BEFORE THE WAR.

Christmas Celebrations on the Old Plantations.

Before the war Christmas was one day of all days, or rather a pastoral Saturnalia that set 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 an ax and arm. That, of course, only through the race; but all day long 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 dancing 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 equaled 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 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 put down their Christmas, but faith in the miracle of the manger remains.—Harper's Bazar.

Count von Moltke attributes his attainment of old age to "God's mercy and moderation in all things." He specially advises that no one shall ever spend a whole day indoors, not even if the day be rainy.

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BRUISES,
FROST-BITES,
INFLAMMATIONS
—AND ALL—
HURTS AND ILLS
OF MAN AND BEAST.
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