A Chrismas Reunion.

By Helen Palmer.

"Don't you think it's getting pretty cold here, Emeroy?" said Myra Crane, winding her arms tightly in her knit shawl.

"Yes, and I don't believe another soul'll be in to buy anything; it must be close on to 10 o'clock; that's late enough to keep open, even Christmas eve. How do you like keeping store, Myra? We've done pretty well for the home anyway; $18 in the drawer, and most everything gone except those awful knit tidies Miss Elmore sent, and Mamie Turner's two dolls. They've been in the window all day long, where they showed up good, but I was afraid they cost too much when she brought them in."

Myra looked around the little store where Miss Hyde's goods and "notions" were jumbled together to make room for the articles contributed to the annual sale for the "children's home." "Wouldn't you hate to stay here day in and day out?" she whispered.

"You gettin' real tired, girls?" came in a pleasant voice from the back room and Palmyra Hyde appeared, a woolen cloud around her head. "I know it's pretty late, an' you've been real faithful—stayin' all the afternoon—but I wonder if you'd mind stayin' a little mite longer while I go out an' get some flannen—guess Randall's is open yet. I've got to have some to make a shroud; there's a poor woman dyin' that'll need it likely before Monday an' tomorrow bein' Christmas an' a Saturday, there won't be another chance."

"All right Miss Hyde, we'll wait," responded Emeroy, cheerfully. "My! wouldn't you hate to make a shroud?" she added, as Palmyra stepped out into the lightly falling snow, "all alone here, too."

In a few minutes Palmyra was back again, shaking the clinging flakes from her skirts. "I'm goin' to work right now," she declared, "poor M's Wygant may want it tomorrow, but you girls don't need to wait any longer; better run right along home." She passed into the back room and they presently heard her rocker creaking steadily, as she began to sew.

"Don't let's go and leave her," whispered Emeroy, adding aloud, "we can stay on awhile just as well as not. Miss Hyde, we ain't afraid going home alone—two of us. Who is Mrs. Wygant?"

"Well, that's real good of you; it is kind of lonesome, Christmas eve. M's Wygant? Didn't you ever hear about her? It's real pitiful; she's a Britisher, born in England, and married there, an' had two children. And then her husband didn't do over well—you're so crowded up, you know, in them old countries; so he took a ship to Australia an' was goin' to send back for her an' the babies; but what happened they never knew—no word ever come from him, an' they couldn't never find track nor trail of him, do all they could. 'T seems she didn't have any folks in England near enough to go to, but she had a brother in New York; so she come over to him. Long in last summer he moved up here, but he hadn't mor'n got to work when he took sick an' died. So there she was again, left alone with the children to take care of; an' though she tried to work all she could, she's a delicate little creeter, an' when the cold weather come on she couldn't stan' it. That's what the doctor says; but I believe she's frettin' herself to death for her husband, much as anythin'."

"Emeroy!" gasped Myra, clutching her arm, "look!"

"My! what a scare you gave me!" said Emeroy, sharply, "it's only a man staring in at Mamie's dolls."

"Yes—but his face, pressed against the window—like that!"

"Hush! here he comes."

The stranger pushed the door open and faced the girls in an embarrassed silence.

"Did you want to look at anything?" asked Emeroy, while Mrya drew behind her.

"Are those dolls for sale, Miss?" he asked in a deep voice, muffled by a heavy beard.

"Those dolls in the window? Yes, and they're beauties, too, I guess your little girls would like them all right. And the sale's for the benefit of the home for friendless children; so it'll be good all 'round," Emeroy smiled.

The man's face twitched. "Yes," he said, "I noticed your sign. I'll take both the dolls."

"They're $2. apiece," said Emeroy, tentatively. He dew a bill from his pocket; but after the dolls were wrapped up and he had received his change, he still stood as if waiting.

"Perhaps you'd like to have us send them," suggested Emeroy, "what's the address?"

"I don't know," he faltered, "perhaps, Miss," he continued slowly, "you would know of two little girls, about six and eight years old, that might like the dolls. If you could tell me their names, I should like to write them on the parcels and have you send them. Perhaps you'll think it foolish," he smiled deprecatingly—"but it would seem more like a real Christmas, Miss, if I could write their names."

"Why, of course you can," assented Emeroy, "I know just how you feel."

"That poor woman, Emeroy," whispered Myra. "That's it." nodded Emeroy, and called aloud: "Miss Hyde! are Mrs. Wygant's children boys or girls?"

"Girls, Janie and Susan," came from the back room, but the words were lost in a hoarse cry from the man. Gripping the counter, deadly pale, he stared at Emeroy:

"What did you say?" he gasped.

The girls pushed a chair toward him and Palmyra hurried in. He turned to her: "Tell me quick," he commanded, "where is she?"

"Who?" asked Palmyra, "here you're sick; let me give you something!"

But he pushed aside the glass of water Emeroy had brought, crying fiercely, "No!—for the love of God tell me where Susan Wygant is!"

"She's around here in the next street—"she began. The man rose and moved blindly toward the door. Palmyra caught his arm. "Listen," she urged, "you can't go to her like this. Who are you, anyway? She's sick; she's most dead; any excitement might kill her."

He sank back weakly into the chair, repeating, "Dead! dead!" "I'm her husband," he began, tremulously, "I've been hunting for her these three years," then rising and striking his hand upon the counter, he burst out wildly, "Don't tell me she's going to die, woman! She can't—now!"

"Well, well," said Palmyra, laying her hand upon his trembling arm, "perhaps she won't—of course there don't no one really know." As she wrapped her shawl about her, she muttered to herself, "I hope to goodness I ain't making a mistake!" Then turning to him, she said cheerfully, "Come along, I'll risk it anyway! Girls!" she called from the door, "can you stay till I get back? An' do you mind workin' on that—?" she nodded toward the back room—"it may be wanted before morning."

"All right, Miss Hyde!" cried Emeroy, and Myra hurried after the stranger. "You forgot these," she said, offering him the dolls; "you'll want them for Janie and Susan."

"Janie and Susan!" he stammered. "Yes, Janie and Susan.." And he and Palmyra disappeared in the falling snow.

They hurried past the lighted stores where some belated Christmas shoppers still lingered; they brushed the fragrant spruce trees that lay heaped along the walk, powdered with snow that glittered in the glare of the street lamps; and finally, turning down a dark street, they came to a door which opened upon a steep and narrow stair. At the top of the flight Palmyra said, "Wait here," and the man was left standing on the small square landing. But not alone, for as the door opened to admit his guide, a little child slipped through and stood staring at the stranger. The light was dim and he fell upon his knees, bringing his eager eyes on a level with her wondering gaze, and held his arms out with a tender cry; but she drew back, frightened, and half opened the door for flight. Fumbling hastily in his pockets, he brought out a mysterious white parcel, and slowly stripping off the wrappings, disclosed the flaxen curls and pink cheeks of a doll more beautiful than any Janie had ever dreamed of. With a low cry of delight, the child stretched out her arms, and when this splendor was laid gently in them, half closing her eyes in a smile of absolute content she let her new friend draw her to him while she stroked the golden hair and rosy, fluffy gown with cautious finger tips. Suddenly she darted forward, pushed the door open, and called, "Susan!"

At this cry the man sprang to his feet with a groan, but he controlled himself and sank again upon his knees, gathering Janie to him, as an older child came out and stood, staring in amazement at Janie in a stranger's arms, her yellow, curly head resting confidingly against his breast.

"Janie!" she cried in horror, and seizing her violently, tried to wrench her away; but Janie drew back, setting her sturdy legs firmly, and spread the glorious doll before Susan's astonished eyes.

Afraid to speak, the father groped for the other doll and essayed to lay it in Susan's arms, but clasping her hands resolutely behind her back, she gazed in forbidding silence upon the tempter.

Janie looked on for a moment, serene in her full acceptance of a kindly providence, then slipping across to her sister, she clasped both chubby arms about her neck and whispered softly, "Susie, it's Christmas eve; and I fink he's Santa Claus!"

"Are you Santa Claus?" asked Susan, fixing him with eager eyes, and as he hesitated, her voice rose to a wail, "if you are, give me something for mother—something to make her well! Oh, mother! mother!"—and bursting into a passion of tears, she pushed the door open and was gone.

"I'm your father, Janie, your father! Don't you want me?" cried John Wygant, piteously, catching the startled child to him. But before she could speak or cry out, Palmyra appeared in the doorway, looking very grave. "Come in," she said, "I've told her all I dasst."

Still holding Janie's passive hand, John stepped slowly in and passed on to a dimly lighted room. As he entered, there came a cry from the bed of such abounding joy that with one glance to assure herself that life had not gone in that supreme effort, Palmyra turned quickly, went out and gently closed the door, whispering, "Well, I dunno as I done right—the doctor not here and all—but I'll risk it. 'Twas most worth dying for!" she added, with a sigh of deeply satisfied emotion.

Half an hour later she opened the door of her shop, and falling into a chair, began to cry, softly rocking back and forth. Myra rose and hung over her, unwinding her cloud and unpinning her shawl.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Hyde," said Emeroy, bending over the long white seam, "no wonder you're all upset. Did he turn out to be her husband?—But, poor thing! Perhaps she's better off where she is. Hadn't I better hurry up and finish this?"

"No, you needn't," said Palmyra, wiping her eyes resolutely, "jest throw it to one side; there ain't anyone goin' to need it this trip, thank the Lord! Girls, that man is her husband! He's been looking for her all over creation ever since he got out of a hospital where he'd been took after a hurt to his hed he got on shipboard. An' the doctor's been there an' he says it's all right—an' she's goin' to get well. I jest wish you could a seen her face, girls!—Well, there, I'm a old fool, I guess. Good night, you've been real good. Good night, merry Christmas! An' a happy New Year!"

$500 More a Year Farming.

Nearly all that is said in the following article, written by Prof. C. W. Burkett, for the Progressive Farmer, is so true that it may be said that the propositions are self-evident. We endorse the whole of it, except a part of one sentence, that is where he says that meat from our razor-backs is poor in quality. We no not think that they are profitable stock for a farmer to keep. But the quality of the meat is good, a pig from 9 to 10 months old, well-fattened, then killed and a ham roasted furnishes the most delicious meat that we have ever tasted. Still we do not on this account consider that they should be kept for breeding.

Prof. Burkett's article is as follows:

There is an old couplet that runs:

"No cattle, no manure;
No manure, no crops."

So true is this saying that it should be a memory gem for every kind of an education. The whole philosophy of farming is expressed in these few words. What our agriculture needs—more than fertilizers; more than cotton mills; more even than cities with the varied industries—is live stock; because live stock includes all of these; because it markets to the world, and changes the raw materials of the soil into finished products that go wherever steam, water or electricity may carry.

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A farmer by birth and raising, from the West, but now in North Carolina, said to me not long ago: "The Middle South is the stockman's home. No section in the country can equal it in all things that are incident to successful stock-raising."

"Are you satisfied that soil, climatic conditions, and feeding-stuffs are altogether desirable for the highest success in live stock raising?" I asked.

"I am satisfied there is no place better; and my only regret is that I did not discover the land long ago."

Soil, climate, and feeding-stuffs! What more is needed? Nothing:—they are the trinity for stock-raising.

And the man knows. There is no sentiment with him. Successful in the West, prominent as a cattle breeder, he knows what he wants; he speaks because he has the authority, of his own knowledge and experience. He advises his Western friends to come South. Why? Because he knows present day needs and interprets present day possibilities. He is no dreamer. He is a doer; his scores of cattle—fine in quality, splendid in form, profitable in management—end the story.

Ours, then is a live stock section. Nature made it so. No fighting to establish new conditions at variance with those of the ages past; no experiment to make with questionable results; no conclusions guessed at before the problem is demonstrated; rather, it is for us to take hold and do that which soil, climate and feeding-stuffs call us to do.

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"How will live stock aid me, an average farmer, to increase my yearly income?"

Have you ever raised hogs? let me