

A CHRISTMAS KEY

BY CHARLES POOLE CLEAVER.

It was a o'clock—Christmas eve. The tower bell tolled off the year with no perceptible enthusiasm. The snow was muffled in the street, the lights reflected by the snow on the roofs of the houses, the air was filled with a soft, hazy glow. The streets were almost deserted and the walks were scantily populated. Mrs. Gracie, a missionary, leaned against a lamp-post and sighed. The wind pelted his slouch hat. His brown beard was white with the driven snow. The day had been busy, the week had been busy, the year much the same. On a final errand uptown, away from the river front of tenements and mills, he felt like pausing to lay aside his perpetual smile and to ponder the ways of the world, and he thought of his great coat, surveying the mansions on either side of the boulevard. He might be sitting inside, a handsome lounge, amid the preparations for Christmas. Mill owners and business men and their households were the cordial friends and contributors. But tonight he was not in the mood. He had been starting a bright light of the windows and the swift forms moving; at the darkness of the Gracie residence most majestic even in its decay. The other side of the street, a small bundle of light. She carried her way to the sidewalk, her house key from her pocket and a small, round snow. At her outcry of dismay, St. Clause ceased his neck and settled back with a murmur that sounded like the ghost of a smile.

"St. Clause!" Mrs. Gracie's voice was sharp and thin. "We must not stop again! Get me to my husband's office at the mills. I want his key. Remember, the last trolley passes there—"

"Long before your husband goes home," he interrupted.

"What of that? Be civil, please. If my husband prefers his evenings at the office, what is that to you?"

"Come!"

They tramped on; the woman who drew dividends from factories and tenements whose inside walls she had never seen; who gave to charities on which she had never smiled; who had relieved with which she had never sympathized, and created happiness in which she had never shared; and the city missionary in his rebellious mood, uncertain of purpose, praying that some vision of his world might fall upon the woman who had lost her key.

"Well, what is that but singing? Are you going to take me to my husband's office. I have never driven this way. Why do we not go the shortest way?"

"Cross town—we shall arrive. But listen a minute!"

"Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation! Sing all ye bright hosts of heaven above!

Glorious to God, all glory in the highest! Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!"

"Well, what is it?"

He turned down the narrow avenue that leads from the thoroughfare to the mills district. The lights of the Mission shown across the snow. As they passed the loiterers she took his arm. They entered the hallway. The room was half filled with men and women, boys and girls. On each wing of the platform and facing the piano in the center sat a double quartet; behind each quartet, a chorus.

"The Gracie choir," he whispered. "This is really rehearsal. That young director sings in your church every Sunday. Tomorrow these quartets and choruses will be singing carols among the English tenements of the mill district."

"Yes, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee, be all glory given. Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing! Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!"

"So they preserve the English custom?"

"It is a self-consciousness was lifted for the moment like a shroud from the soul."

"Yes; and I applied your latest gift to the mission to the training of these choruses."

He watched the flush of pleasure that rose like dawn.

"Out in the dining room and kitchen 30 people are preparing the Christmas dinner. Shall we see them?"

The light faded. The shroud of unconsciousness fell again.

"No. Take me to my husband's office. I want his key."

He turned, sorrowfully, and they passed to the street. The wind had decreased. The snow fell less heavily. Silent and dejected, St. Clause offered his arm and they sought the bridge-end of the avenue that crossed the river to the mills.

The bridge-end was almost deserted. Fifty yards before them a woman clasping a burden, wavered on with uncertain steps.

"She staggers," whispered Mr. Gracie.

St. Clause hastened. The woman loitered; sank in the snow; lifted her arm to the forehead, and lay back upon the white pillows. From her breast rose a child's wail.

Mrs. Gracie shivered and sprang forward with a cry. Her steps were quick as the strides of St. Clause. She caught the babe as it slipped from the mother's arms to the snow. The soft feel of it, wrapped in a coarse coverlet, set her arms tingling.

"If the long trailing club moss with St. Clause," he murmured. "What brought you here from your bed tonight?"

The lips parted with a sigh, moved unthinkingly, closed, and death sealed them.

"Come!" said St. Clause.

He panted with his burden up the rickety stairway and swung open a door where noisy revelers were struck dumb by the sudden appearance. Only the outcry of a woman was heard.

"Light up Mrs. Dunham's room!" commanded St. Clause; and turning half-way, he struck another light. On the disheveled bed from which she had sprung, for some errand only to be surprised by her flight toward the dark river, the mother's form was laid again; on her features the beauty and peace of rest and life everlasting.

Mrs. Gracie had thrown off her cloak and wrapped it, warm from her body, about the child.

"Dunham's poor dear, dear baby," she sobbed and drew its face to hers. "Was it this young woman's—this girl's? Where is the father?"

"Dunham's dead. He was killed yesterday in the Gracie mills." The old woman spoke solemnly. "But her hands trembled over the baby's preparation of the child's nourishment. I leave her one hour ago. She thinks she sleeps."

St. Clause took the baby's food and placed it in Mrs. Gracie's hand.

"Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these," he said softly.

"Oh, it is so little—and so late!" she sobbed passionately. "Give me this child, St. Clause—for mine—for mine! My Christmas baby! Oh, that poor widow! Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Did you really listen? Did you ever really want to know?"

St. Clause waved his hand toward the city streets.

"There are a hundred doors," he said. "The are open to you if you have found the key."

Los Angeles expects to capture in 1913 about 30 conventions of national importance.

THE FIRST LONG DISTANCE CALL



EVERGREENS FOR XMAS DECORATIONS

From the Mother's Magazine.

Evergreens are so much a part of Christmas holidays that it would hardly be Christmas without them. Ways to use them depend somewhat on the particular kinds of evergreens that grow in your part of the country.

If the long trailing club moss with its furry green stems is found there, it is prettier just as nature made it than any other evergreen. The best plan in gathering the ground evergreens is to go out in the late autumn before the frost is fairly in the ground, and keep the "greens" in the cellar or some other cool, dark, damp place, sprinkling them now and then, till they are needed. The little partridge berries and the vine with white, waxy berries, called mountain tea, will grow in the house. But wherever one gets these evergreens, one should never take all there are; leave some to grow for next year.

In using the smooth, shiny evergreens that stand up separately, do not pull up the vines, which are brown and not pretty, but take along scissars and cut the green stalks close to the roots. When you have a basketful of these, you can make wreaths or garlands to your heart's content.

From the foundation of a large wreath, the best thing is a barrel hoop. Wind it with black or dark green cotton stuff, and use dark thread or wire. The prettiest wreath made of mixed spruce twigs and evergreens. This large wreath should be put high up in the largest open space, or over a mantel, and a gilded star, a Christmas plectrum or a stuffed bird, can be fastened in the middle. All the garlands and other decorations may be arranged so as to make this big wreath the center. Smaller wreaths may be hung in the windows. Holly always beautiful with evergreens, and its scarlet and green look pretty anyhow and anywhere, but if holly cannot be had, bows of scarlet ribbon such as can be bought at the millinery stores, are beautiful to set off the green. Some people use crepe paper flowers, but if they are used at Christmas they should always be white.

Christmas decorations for a house are evergreen ropes, which are light and graceful and irregular. Snip off the tips of evergreen branches instead of using large boughs, and in winding garlands make them light and airy looking. A spool of fine dark wire is the best thing for this, for one twist of it will fasten stem to stem, but another way is to use very narrow dark tape or old dress braid and sew the evergreens to it, doubling up the tape as you sew, so that there will be no gaps.

A moss covered shield with a motto in partridge berries is a lovely thing, but the motto should be long—two words at most. For the letters, either partridge berries or green and white flowers can be used. Cut out the letters in cardboard, using old German or English type, and sew the flowers or clusters of berries to it so that the letters will stand out distinctly. The shield ought to be made of a thin board. Green moss enough to cover it should be laid on so as to make an even surface, and the edges either painted green or hidden by a fringe of green vines or ferns. Drive tacks in at the edges, and wind back coarse thread or green twine around and across the shield, fastening it on the tacks. These strings will well and pin on the letters with wire hair pins, stuck into the moss.

The finishing touch to Christmas decorations should always be the table. A pretty southern custom is to let the flowers for the table be sprinkled about on the cloth irregularly, and this is a charming way to use either holly, evergreen or partridge berries, which can also be pinned on the corners of the tablecloth where they hang down, or in the case of holly or evergreen branches, one or two festoons can be wired to the corners of the table.

From the middle of the table the prettiest things possible is a Christmas tree. This may be either a tiny spruce or fir, or one of the fruited pepper trees always for sale at Christmas. There should be a tiny candle for each one of the company, to be lighted at the very end of the dinner, while the coffee and the nuts and raisins are being served. Some small, non-flammable gift for each person may be hung on the tree and presented at the beginning of the dinner. A plan which was followed in one family was to have for those guests the small paper packages and to be bought at any favor shop. The place cards were in small envelopes that with red and gold ribbons,

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and addressed, while the reverse of the card bore a rhymed description of the animal to be claimed by the recipient, giving some absurd reason why it was selected. For example, the artist of the family received a peacock, and his place card bore the rhyme:

"View not this peacock with surprise, giving some absurd reason why it was selected. He must have eyes your work to see, And they're all green with jealousy!"

The centerpiece for the Christmas table should not take up any more room than it must, and that is one reason why the tree or plant in a pot is better than anything else.

Little canoes full of moss and green berries with a neatly tied packet of cards or underneath are pretty, but the paper should be waterproof if damp moss is used. And for an inexpensive and at the same time charming place card, nothing is better than an empty chestnut burr filled with wex ferns and partridge vines and moss. The white card may be set up in the burr.

A way of using the newest fashion in place cards is to select particularly pretty holly twigs with berries on them and paint the name in gold paint on the largest leaf.

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Christmas question. Her hands refused the deft service they had so often rendered in fashioning love tokens. Her purse was leaner than usual. She had learned, too, that in some cases her giving had prompted recipients to feel under obligation to give in return when they ought not. What should she do? she could not be content to let Christmas go by without some form of love expression. While she was thinking in this way, a child passing her window lifted a sweet voice to sing, "Scatter Sunshine." The listener roused herself and exclaimed, "I know, I know. I'll scatter smiles the year round." With a quiet prayer that she might not forget what her Christmas giving was to be, she settled back to contentment. Following out her resolutions she made smiles do what sometimes she had expected cold words to do. Whenever she asked for a favor she did so with a smile on her lips. When little difficulties arose she smiled them away. Even when she must reprove she smiled and said, "I know you want to do better. In she went where many were and friction was likely to arise, she smiled and spoke sweet words. She wrote notes of sympathy and cheer to those in trouble, to the very limits of her circle of acquaintance. She sent words of appreciation to all who had in any wise served her or been kind during the year.

This was a lesson learned by a mature woman, but it is not too hard for children. They can learn the art of smiling hearts is the secret of all true Christmas giving and that if they scatter smiles they are touching hearts in a most helpful way.

Many opportunities can be found by the wide-awake mother to show that smiles often meet difficulties and stimulate courage as truly as money gifts do.

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Sewing Table Supplied With Fittings
A very Useful Gift.

A small colonial sewing table is of solid mahogany in the English and has taper legs. There are two drop leaves and two drawers, one divided for spoons, etc., with a sliding tray which will be found convenient. The other drawer is without compartments. The table is \$15.50. For an additional small sum this table could be fitted up very completely with scissors, needles, bodkins, silk, cottons, fastenings of all sorts, etc. This would make an extremely useful gift, says Harper's Bazar. One thoughtful woman made it a point, whenever possible, to give such a table to the brides of her acquaintances. What they aren't industrious with their needles, she says, "It is an incentive to make them so; when they are it's an encouragement." In any event these fitted sewing tables are a great convenience and this particular model will be found a good one.

The Stranger.
From the Pittsburg Post.

A stranger knocked at a man's door and told him of a fortune to be made.

"Um," said the man, "it appears that considerable effort will be involved."

"Oh, yes," said the stranger, "you will pass many sleepless nights and tollsome days."

"Um," said the man, "and who are you?"

"I am called Opportunity."

"Um," said the man, "you call yourself Opportunity, but you look like Hard Work to me."

And he slammed the door.

Fore-sight.
From the Woman's Home Companion.

"You must believe in saving for a rainy day, Binks?"

"Er, ah, do, but why?"

"Nothing, only that's the second umbrella of mine you've borrowed."

Learn Proper Way to Handle Carving Knife

There is really nothing very difficult about carving, provided you have a sharp knife and a carving fork to hold the meat steady. Even the most accomplished professional carver cannot show much skill with a knife dull as the proverbial hoe and nothing but a dinner fork to steady the meat. And right here lies the principal reason why the average man or woman becomes discouraged and either gives up the art in despair or contents himself with prying off uneven slices. "First catch your hare," said the old recipe for jugged hare, and so the would-be carver must have a sharp carving knife before commencing operations. Any large sized knife that is made of good steel and can be sharpened to a keen edge will serve excellently for a carving knife, much better than the most elaborate carving set of poor quality, writes Mrs. Sarah Moore in the Chicago Inter Ocean.

Roast beef is one of the easiest of all meats to carve. A rolled roast is a rib roast with the ribs removed and the meat rolled and skinned firmly in place. The fat is scored by the butcher so as to let the meat roll properly. To carve this hold the knife flat and with a quick sawing motion cut clear across, holding it firmly with the fork placed low on the left side.

A fillet of beef should be cut into slices half an inch thick from one end to the other; the thickness being greater in some places than in others gives the carver an opportunity to offer well done and rare meat from the same place.

To carve a rib roast, cut slowly across the heavy end to free the meat from the ribs from right to left and then cut the meat in this slice. For a sirloin roast, first cut out close to the bone the tenderloin, next remove the rounded end of the meat, and slice the sirloin, always cutting across the grain. People who like fat should be given a thin slice from the end piece.

Lamb and mutton are slightly more difficult to carve than beef. Roast leg of lamb should always be placed on the platter so that the leg bone comes at the carver's left hand. Stick the carving fork firmly into the center of the meat over the bone, and slice the meat down the center, first to the right and then to the left, loosening the meat from the bone by a sideways motion of the knife. The breast of lamb and the forequarter are a trifle more complicated. It is sometimes rather difficult to separate the shoulder from the breast so that the ribs can be reached.

Beware of the Christmas Candle

There is scarcely a city in the United States in which the pleasure of Christmas is not marred by one or more distressing accidents resulting from the use of candles upon Christmas trees.

The practice of decorating trees for the holiday festivities has increased at a great rate during the past few years. The risk of fires, burns and deaths, therefore, has advanced rapidly, and were it not for the growing use of electric outfits upon Christmas trees, this holiday might be expected to rival the Fourth of July in casualties.

Every year, however, the newspapers of the country are devoting more and more effort toward preventing accidents caused by the Christmas candle, just as they have done work beyond price in connecting same methods of celebrating the national birthday.

With Christmas near at hand, it behooves us not to forget the menace of the Christmas candle. It is the cause of many a tragedy, the whippers of some pseudo Santa or the real elf from the head of a high priced and really useless doll with blinking eyes and a reversible smile. There is a real menace of life and property, accompanied by the risk of utterly spoiling the decorations.

The temptation to one have to use candles is increased by the fact that many of the lights and shades used on the trees and candy cases by the thousands nestled in among the green boughs, but designed to be used in the way of protecting the decorations, are made of paper and are liable to catch fire and burn.

Christmas tree lighting cannot be made safe unless the candles used are of the best quality. Candles should be bought at any favor shop. The place cards were in small envelopes that with red and gold ribbons,

to with equal taste to adorn birthday cakes with no such likelihood of the affair developing into an experiment in cremation. Mice are also fond of them, and they can even be used for house lights in times of emergency. In decorating the Christmas tree with them, however, it is well to reckon with the possible consequences. Arcos is not particularly well suited to the spirit of the day.

For decorative purposes of all kinds, including Christmas trees, special electric lighting outfits may be obtained from any dealer in electrical supplies. These decorative lighting outfits may be purchased with plain colored bulbs, or with small bulbs representing a variety of special objects such as birds, stars, fruits, sweet animals, snow men, clouds and Santa Claus himself.

The little lamps are attached to insulated wires covered with green braid, these wires are strung along the whippers or some pseudo Santa or the real elf from the head of a high priced and really useless doll with blinking eyes and a reversible smile. There is a real menace of life and property, accompanied by the risk of utterly spoiling the decorations.

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"No, dear," said the mother, "we give our Christmas gifts in memory of the love that gave freely, and looked for no return. If we give a single gift without love in our hearts, we are doing wrong. Suppose grandpa were ill some Christmas, and not able to send a gift to us, would we decide not to send her any?"

"Oh, no!" cried the little girl. "We would send her twice as much."

"To be true," said the mother. "And now that we may be sure not to forget that Christmas giving is all love, let us plan a gift to someone who will certainly not send us one. Whom can you think of?"

It took only a moment for the child to name a family in unfortunate circumstances because of a long illness of the father. What pleasure she took in planning the basket that should go to them, she carefully counted out her pennies to buy her own gift for the little girl. Then the Christmas eve journey when the basket was left on the doorstep by father, who ran away after he knocked. The little girl was waiting around the corner, and she fairly jumped up and down until father joined her, and then they both peeped cautiously. It was most exciting to hear the other little girl shout when she pulled the cover of the big basket.

"They'll never know who sent it!" she chanted on the way home.

By such simple lessons was she learning the meaning of the true Christmas spirit.

Christmas Smiles.
From the Mother's Magazine.

One dear little woman whose heart throbbed with love was "weak and weary" as she sat pondering the