

THE CHRISTMAS STOCKING.

Oh, it's all very nice for you! But for me it's a tale of woe. I'm an article sad to view, For they've stuffed and they've crammed me...

CROSS PURPOSES;

Or, The Widow Mack's Disappointment—A New Year's Story.

(Written for This Paper.)



OR almost three years the sharp-voiced, black-eyed Widow Mack, Dr. Paul Blake's housekeeper, had ruled with a rod of iron. But the Doctor, who was a single man of thirty odd, peace-loving and absorbed in his profession, submitted meekly, principally from the fact of his housekeeper's culinary skill and general ability.

Three times a year Mrs. Mack had been in the habit of giving Dr. Blake "warning" in more or less impassioned terms. The alleged causes were sins of omission or commission on the respective parts of the "hired help," Bob, the office-boy, and Miss Doris Lane, the Doctor's nineteen-year-old ward.

It was the morning after Christmas Day in the year of grace 1888. Dr. Blake was in his library and office combined, hoping for a quiet hour with the *Lancet*, which he held in his hand with pages uncut, as Mrs. Mack, whose black eyes were snapping ominously, flung—I use the word advisedly—into the room.

With a premonition of what was coming, the Doctor laid aside the pamphlet. "Well, Mrs. Mack," he said, wearily, "which—that is—who—I mean, what is it now?"

"This day week, Dr. Blake, either Miss Doris or I leave—you can choose between us," responded the Widow Mack, with ominous calmness. Barring the name of the offender, her formula of warning was always the same. Possibly she dreamed that by patient persistence in this line the Doctor in some unguarded moment might be led to say: "Then, Mrs. Mack, my advice will be—yourself."

Why not? The widow only acknowledged to thirty-six, her figure was trim, her face not unbecomingly and she held property in her own right. In addition to this her cookery was unequalled, and is it not recorded that masculine hearts untouched by personal charms have been reached through the vulgar medium of the stomach?

"Not being the dirt under Miss Doris' feet," scornfully continued Mrs. Mack, before Dr. Blake could speak, "I don't propose being trod on no longer. The *idea!*" said the irate lady, with a backward toss of her head; "ordering me out of her study or just because I said her goings on with your nephew, Paul Blake, was scandalous! Things have come to a pretty pass in this house, I think!"

Dr. Blake groaned in spirit as Mrs. Mack slammed the door behind her. "Why can't she let Doris alone," he muttered, and when he said "Doris" it was with a peculiarly tender inflection. But that, perhaps, was because of the semi-parental relation in which he pretended to stand toward her.

in oil. Before it, holding palette and mahl-stick in rest, stood pretty Doris, the graceful outlines of whose figure even the ugly blue bottomed blouse reaching to her feet could not hide.

Reclining at ease in an old arm-chair near the little air-tight stove which served to warm the interior, was Paul Blake, the doctor's good-looking artist nephew, twirling an unlighted cigarette between his slim white fingers.

Before Doctor Blake could step forward to announce his presence, Paul spoke—evidently apropos of some thing under discussion. "It's no use talking, Doris," he said, somewhat petulantly. "If uncle Paul won't give his consent to our marriage, as you seem to think, why we must do without it, that's all."

Doctor Blake turned very pale as he heard these words not intended for his ear. But pulling himself together with an effort, he stepped forward.

At his unexpected appearance Doris gave a sudden start and, orrisoning to her fair temple, threw a cloth over the portrait. But not before Doctor Blake had caught a glimpse of his nephew's broad white forehead and expressive eyes.

The Doctor, pretending to have heard and seen nothing, greeted Paul with his usual easy courtesy. But that usually self-possessed young man, muttering something about a previous engagement, made a hasty exit, leaving the Doctor and his ward alone together.

Silent and distant, and utterly unlike the happy young girl who was accustomed to greet him with her brightest smile, Doris stood with downcast eyes seemingly intent on studying the colors on her palette.

Now his nephew's fragmentary speech had completely upset Doctor Blake—if I may use the homely simile. He had known for some time that Paul had persistently haunted Doris' studio to the scandal of Mrs. Mack, and his own secret uneasiness. But that matters had gone so far he never dreamed.

Yet, being a brave man, Dr. Blake crushed down his rebellious feelings. He had come on a mission of peace. A little finesse might be advisable, for impulsive Doris was not apt to listen patiently when Mrs. Mack, whom she exceedingly disliked, was the topic. Perhaps he had better begin by mentioning the invitation that morning received and accepted for himself and Doris to eat their New Year's dinner with the Marstons. Thus he could lead up to the topic desired by slow degrees.

"I suppose, Doris," said the Doctor, breaking an awkward silence, "that—er—Mrs. Mack has told you we are engaged?" "She has just given me to understand so—yes," coldly interrupted Doris.

This was not encouraging. He would beat about the bush no longer but mention his errand at once. "As you know, Doris," again began Dr. Blake, nervously clearing his throat, "Mrs. Mack is a most excellent housekeeper, and we—"

Doris' beautiful face, as pale as death, was suddenly turned toward him, checking his further explanation. "I do not care to listen to a recital of Mrs. Mack's accomplishments or virtues," cried Doris, with a passionate resentment unlike the Doris he knew—"she and I are thoroughly antagonistic. It does not matter though," she said, with a sudden half-paathetic change of voice and manner—"we shall not trouble each other in the future. I—I have accepted an offer I received to-day and shall no longer be dependent on your—bounty."

Though stricken to the heart Dr. Blake was too proud to make any sign. He waited a moment for Doris to explain further, but Doris was dumb. Could he have seen her quivering lips he might have known the reason.

"I hope you may be happy in your new life, Doris." It cost Dr. Blake a tremendous effort to say this. Too well he knew the weak will and vacillating purpose of his nephew, who would never succeed in his calling, simply from lack of energy and application. And this was the man who had won his pretty ward!

"Thank you," said Doris, in a low tone. But, as she suddenly lifted her deep, sharp eyes to his own, what was it that, for one brief moment, he fancied he saw in their inscrutable depths? All the self-repressed passion of his nature rose suddenly to the surface. For the first time in his years of guardianship, Dr. Paul Blake forgot to hold himself in check.

help, though as Paul—I mean the Doctor—says he didn't mind the extra expense while he was single with only himself to care for. But now, why—"

Here Mrs. Mack checked herself and coyly dropped her eyes to the table cloth, a corner of which she was plaiting between her fingers in seeming confusion.

"Neither Dr. Blake or yourself need fear being burdened with me much longer," replied Doris, with quiet scorn. And as she rose and left the room, Mrs. Mack smiled unpleasantly.

"One of us will leave, but it won't be Althea Mack," she remarked, in triumphant confidence, to herself. But this remains to be seen.

Slowly the old year dragged his lagging footsteps toward the portal where the New Year child stood impatiently awaiting the departure of his nearly worn-out predecessor. Doris, cold and silent, saw but little of her guardian, who, far graver and more pre-occupied than was his wont, silently noted the frequent comings and goings of his nephew, who as far as possible seemed to shrink from an interview.

Dr. Blake waited from day to day with a vain hope that Doris might come to him with her confidence as in other days. But the young girl painted steadily at the unfinished portrait for which—according to Mrs. Mack—his nephew Paul was "settling," and Dr. Blake never again intruded himself on their presence.

It was the last evening of the old year. Dr. Blake, thoroughly tired out by an unusually hard day's work, was sitting in his office library looking absently into the open

fire-place where the flames were dancing a weird measure in fantastic time to the voice of the winter wind in the old-fashioned, wide-mouthed chimney.

Bob, the office boy, stood in a back-ground of shadow awaiting the Doctor's commands for the morrow, vaguely wondering what had come over his usually genial employer of late.

"May be it's as folks says—that Miss Mack's bound to marry him whether he's willin' or not," colloquized Bob; "and if he's afeard of that, I don't wonder he's down in the mouth."

But all unobserved by his office boy's anxiety in his own mind, Dr. Blake sat with half-closed eyes, in a morbid obscurity, for a pinhead of flame from a lamp set at the rear and the blaze of the wood fire itself alone relieved the darkness of the room.

A rustle as of a woman's dress caused the Doctor to give a sudden start! At last Doris had come.

"Dreaming of your lady love, doctor?" Alas the voice, simulating an archness entirely foreign to the speaker, was that of Mrs. Mack, who, arrayed as for conquest, advanced into the circle of firelight and carelessly placed a rather shapely foot on the fender.

"Well, yes," was the absent reply. For Dr. Blake, who, in addition to an unusually laborious day, had been up with a dangerous case nearly all the night before, was in that curious state between waking and sleeping, when men see visions and dream dreams, yet are perfectly conscious as to what is going on about them.

Something in Dr. Blake's voice and manner caused the fossil remains of an organ Mrs. Mack was pleased to designate as her heart, to give a dull throb. She had read of masculine hearts caught at the rebound. By this time Dr. Blake knew that his case was hopeless with the child of a girl he had been temporarily infatuated. Should she strike while the iron was hot?

"When Miss Doris and your nephew are married, you and I Doctor will be left quite alone!" said Mrs. Mack, with a tender look, which was entirely lost on the Doctor, who had subsided into his waking slumber. As in a vision he again saw Doris' deep eyes looking into his own with the strange intensity which once before had thrilled him through and through. And, extending his arms, Dr. Blake said, aloud: "My darling—come."

would see Doris the first thing in the morning and explain it. When a couple of hours after sunrise Dr. Blake opened his heavy eyes on New Year's morn, they rested at once on a framed portrait hanging against the opposite wall. Where had it come from. Who was it intended for?

For a closer view showed the Doctor that the general contour of the features were his own. So also was the blonde mustache, but here to his own mind the resemblance ceased. The likeness between himself and his nephew Paul had often been commented on. This picture might have been Paul with twenty years added to his age, or himself with ten subtracted.

With a sad smile Doctor Blake read the inscription on a card pinned on the frame. A New Year's gift for my "dear" erased guardian from his ("affectionate" erased) ward.

"It is plain that Doris' forte is not portrait painting," he said, with a very audible sigh. And then wondering how he should introduce the awkward explanation he was meaning to make, the doctor went down to breakfast.

Replying rather curtly to Mrs. Mack's affectionate New Year's greeting, Dr. Blake looked about the room. "Miss Doris not down yet?" he said, with affected carelessness.

Mrs. Mack drew herself up primly. "Sarah tells me, Doctor, that at sunrise this morning she let Miss Doris out at the front door fully dressed for traveling and carrying a large hand sachel. She gave no explanation, but simply said she was going away for good, and in due time would write us. And from the fact that our milkman saw Mr. Paul Blake with a young lady who exactly answers her description getting into the Boston train at 6:45, I incline to the opinion that they have gone off to get married."

Dr. Blake, who had himself well in hand, made no audible comment on this surprising bit of news, which in reality was the final blow to his vague hopes. And Mrs. Mack, tucking a tiny, tear-blotted note addressed to Dr. Paul Blake a little further down in her pocket, noted with inward satisfaction that his appetite appeared in no way impaired by what he had heard.

"We will have a talk when I come in from my calls, Mrs. Mack," he said, with his usual courtesy; but the widow thought she detected an undertone of warmth in his speech, and her hopes ran higher than ever.

Bob was waiting the doctor's appearance in the office with manifest impatience. It was evident that he had nerved himself up to the fulfillment of some important duty, regardless of consequences.

"Look here, Doctor," he said, in a cautious undertone, the moment Dr. Blake had closed the door behind him; "there's things that's got to be said, whether you think I'm a interferin' with what's none of my business or not. First and foremost, you've let Miss Mack drive Miss Doris away from the house—"

"Nothing of the sort, Bob," sharply interrupted Dr. Blake. "Miss Doris has—has run off with my nephew, Paul, to be married."

"Beggin' your pardon, but she ain't," coolly returned Bob, who was nothing if not blunt spoken. "Mr. Paul's been an' loped with Judge Haynes' daughter, which isn't only eighteen years old, and the Judge is jest wild about it; every body's talkin' of it down-town."

Dr. Blake fell into the nearest chair and sat staring speechlessly at Bob, who, with great inward gusto, went on: "Seems he told Miss Doris all about it, and she tried to get him off the notion, but twasn't no use. So he'n Miss Haynes has gone off to Boston to get married, and Miss Doris she's took the train to Portland, where she's had a offer for to teach music and drawin' in the Presbyterian Institute."

"How do you know all this, Bob?" hoarsely demanded Doctor Blake, feeling as though every thing was slipping from under his feet.

"Didn't Miss Doris tell me last night when she got me to hang your picer in your bed-room on the sly, and she crying like her heart was a-breakin'?" boldly returned Bob; "and didn't she say she hadn't no home here any longer, now that you was goin' to marry Mrs. Mack? But I've writ a note that'll explain it all," she says, 'and Doctor Blake'll find it under his plate in the mornin'—"

Doctor Blake did not wait for further explanations. Ten minutes later he had left the house, caught the 9:15 express for Portland, and reached there by 11 a. m.

RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL. —We are pilgrims, not settlers; this earth is our inn, not our home.—Vincet.

—God is better served in resisting a temptation to evil than in many formal prayers.—William Penn.

—The degree of master of arts was recently conferred on five young ladies by the Royal University of Ireland.

—The New Zealand Methodist advocates independence for New Zealand Methodism, which is now a part of the Austrian Conference.

—The largest Swedish Lutheran Church in America is the one just completed at Minneapolis. It will accommodate 5,000 persons.

—The Syracuse University is in luck, having received, besides a sum of \$50,000 from a friend, the Von Ranke library from Rev. John M. Reid and his wife.

—St. Peter's Parish in Morristown, N. J., is to have a new church which will cost \$110,000 at the least. Its style will be fourteenth century architecture.

—The Wesleyan Methodists report on the Islands of Antigua, St. Kitts, St. Vincents, Barbadoes and Trinidad, 45 missionaries, 117 local preachers, 19,624 full members.

—It is but a short gray day we are together. There ought not to be time for strife, and debate, and harshness, and bitterness. The hand is already laid on the rope that shall ring the knell.—Joseph Parker.

Youthful Innocence.— "Who threw that paper wast?" The teacher pointed up to the ceiling. "Nobody, sir," said honest Tommy, with show of injured feeling: "I went to lay it on the stand, and it just slipped out of my hand."

—This college news comes from Washington Territory: "While playing base ball at Huntsville last week, Prof. R. O. Hawks, superintendent of the public schools of Columbia County, had the misfortune to break one of his legs by coming into collision with another player."

—A physician declares that our educational systems overlook the fact that the main field of education is the nervous system. A comprehensive system of physical education is necessary for the development of latent power, so that thought, desire, and will shall take the form of action.

WIT AND WISDOM. —Keep good company and you shall be of the number.

—The great high road of human welfare lies along the old highway of steadfast well-doing.—Church Union.

—The wealth of man is the number of things which he loves and blesses, which he is loved and blessed by.—Carlisle.

—There is nothing so sweet as duty, and all the best pleasures of life come in the wake of duties done.—Jean Ingelow.



BEFORE IT HOLDING PALETTE AND MAHL-STICK, as something remark. But in comparison with his nephew, Paul Blake, the doctor regarded himself as a modern Methuselah.

Doris Vane's "study" was a rather cozy interior formed by parting a portion of the attic proper with some faded chintz curtains rummaged out from the big cedar-wood chest in the corner. One of the hangings was pushed back for a better side light, and Dr. Blake, who had sought the attic with a view of reconciling Doris and Mrs. Mack, stood still at the head of the stairs regarding the chintz-framed picture before him.

Under the sky-light in the roof was an easel supporting a partly-finished portrait

of a young man, who, in the doctor's opinion, was a very good likeness of his nephew Paul. The picture was painted on a card pinned on the frame. A New Year's gift for my "dear" erased guardian from his ("affectionate" erased) ward.

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