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MONEY TO LOAN
On Real Estate.

APPLY TO D. McLEOD VINCE

Barrister-at-Law, Woodstock, N. B.

THE PRODIGAL'S CHRISTMAS.

Continued from page seven.

Mary said nothing. She made a faint at stacking some plates on the table, and presently she went into her own room. Going to her trunk in a corner, she took out some money, and joined Bill Walton in the back yard.

"You said you was goin' down to the store directly," she said.

"Yes, I am," he replied, a light of expectancy in his dull eyes. "Anything I kin do fer you?"

She put the money into his outstretched hand. "I want you to buy me a nice pocket-knife," she said; "a man's pocket-knife. I want to put it on the tree for Alex."

"Oh, that's it," and he frowned sullenly as he fumbled the bill in his fingers.

"An' I want you to leave it with the committee at the church as you come 'long back," she said. "They'll see that it's hung on the tree."

Bill Walton's face was dark with wrath, but he thrust the money into his pocket and glared at her. "I don't think I'd humor Alex to that extent," he said. "It's good enough in you-all to allow him to come back, without loadin' him down with presents. He ort to be showed whar he belongs; but it takes women to spile a man. But I'll git it" and with that Bill Walton strode angrily away.

That evening the open space in front of the little frame meeting-house, with his dog-kennel belfry on the roof, was ablaze with the light of numerous bonfires. Boys stood in the doorway shooting Roman candles and sky-rockets. Mary went with Mr. and Mrs. Walton. As she took her seat near the great Christmas tree, the top of which reached to the ceiling, she saw Bill Walton across the room sitting alone, a sullen look on his face. The crowd had assembled when Alex came in. Friends on both sides of the aisle reached forward to shake hands and welcome him home, for he was very popular. For a moment he stood looking admiringly at the tree, with its glittering tinsel and burning wax candles, and then he sat down in a retired corner near the oblong wood-stove. Mary eyed him closely; there was a care-worn expression on his face, a tense seriousness, a lack of the merriment that had usually characterized his features. Presently she became conscious that two old men on the bench behind her were talking of Alex, and she bent her attention to their words.

"Yes, I seed the two meet at Dobbs' store," said one of them. "Bill walked right up to him, whar he was talkin' to some fellers in the back end, nigh the stove, an' tol' him they was jest one too many to live in the same settlement, an' that he was a-gwine to stay. I was in hopes Alex would slug him one in the jaw, but he didn't. He fust got red, an' then he got white as a sheet. That's the way he always looks when he's mad. I don't know what he said; he drawed Bill off to one side, an' talked to him sorter gentle-like. Dodds said he promised Bill he'd leave in the mornin', an' that he never meant to balk him in anything."

There was a loud clapping of hands just then, as the minister entered the church, and Mary could not hear any more of the conversation behind her. The preacher's arrival was the signal for the entertainment to begin, and after a hymn was sung he made a little speech, and then began to take the various presents from the tree and deliver them to their recipients.

Among the very first was a beautiful book for Mary, in which Alex had written a cheerful and tender Christmas greeting.

She looked across the room, and caught his eye, and smiled. She had an almost overpowering impulse to go to him and thank him, but her natural timidity held her back. She sat perfectly still, her eyes on the tree, now intent upon only one thing—his receiving her gift, and understanding that he had been in her thoughts; but it was not given him, and the preacher was walking around the tree, pulling the branches apart to see if he had overlooked anything. Other gifts lay in her lap—one of them from Bill Walton—but she did not unwrap them. She now believed that Bill had played her false.

Her blood rushed angrily through her veins. The presentation of gifts was over; the preacher made a speech, and then everybody stood up; some of the men began to make a long table out of rough planks laid across the backs of the benches, and the women busied themselves laying white cloths upon it, and taking delicacies from well-filled baskets. There was to be a feast. The room was filled with the din and confusion on many happy voices.

Mary went across to where Bill Walton still sat, his face clouded over. He looked up half defiantly as she approached, but his eyes went down under her steady stare.

"You didn't git that present fer Alex?" she said.

"No, I didn't," he retorted. "I'll hand the money back to you when we git home; I left it in my room!"

"Why didn't you do it?" she asked, almost fiercely.

"Beca'se I wasn't a-goin' to have you make a fool o' him!" he replied, sharply; and yet

his eyes were shifting here and there, as if he could not look her fairly in the face.

She shrugged her shapely shoulders, and a sneer of contempt lay on her face.

"Well, maybe you'll wish you had," she said, coldly; and she turned suddenly, and went across the room to where Alex stood alone. He did not see her until she was quite near to him, and then he flushed, and stood before her awkwardly, clutching his soft hat in his hands.

"Alex," she said, with a gulp, "I reckon you think I'm mighty mean. I don't want to raise no fuss betwixt you an' Bill, an' I know you won't quarrel with him when I tell you not to; but I sent the money by him to buy you a Christmas present, but he—he refused to do it. Oh, Alex, I'm so miserable! I heer you was goin' away to-morrow."

He started, and stared at her in silence for a moment, and then he said, "Yes, I'm goin' in the mornin' Mary. I had no business comin' back heer tell I've showed folks that I intend to be a new man. God knows I've had enough o' the sort o' life I've been leadin', an' I'm through with it! I hardly know how to tell you; it will sound strange fer me to talk 'bout it, but over thar at Darley I was sorter lonely, an' got to attendin' a revival goin' on thar. I found salvation, Mary; it busted right over me like a bright light, an' I felt as light as a feather. I've learned to know Jesus Christ, an' he's goin' to give me the strength I never had o' my own self. I'm goin' to lead a different life—I know it, fer I ain't tempted like I used to be an' I ain't so easy to git mad."

She was looking straight into his eyes, and her own suddenly filled to overflowing. She tried to speak, but she choked up and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Oh, don't, don't, Mary!" he cried.

"I can't help it," she sobbed. "It's the answer to my prayers. I've been prayin' fer this fer a long time. Don't go away, Alex! I can't stand it—I jest can't stand it! I love you—I've loved you ever sence I was a little girl, an' ef you want me I'll be yore wife. You may have me fer yore Christmas present ef you want me."

He stared at her incredulously. He tried to speak, but his words hung in his throat. The organist had seated herself at the little organ, and everybody was singing a joyous Christmas hymn. Mrs. Walton came to them, and laid her hand on his arm. "I believe you two have come to an agreement," she said, "an' I'm awfully glad. I love you both like you was my own children, an'—an'—well, I want to see you both happier than you've been."

Stockton's Illustration.

When the late Frank R. Stockton was a newspaper man he tried his hand at a bit of fiction, and submitted it to the editor. The editor revised it and, after reading it again, as stated in the Public Ledger and Philadelphia Times, he said:

"It's not bad, Stockton; but you are given too much to cant-terms. Here, for instance, you speak of a woman's waiting 'with baited breath'! Now, what is 'baited breath,' anyway?"

Stockton was prompt in replying to the effect that there was such a thing, surely—that, not long before, he was walking out, and asked the way to a place of a boy who was fishing. The boy mumbled a reply that Stockton could not understand. He asked again, and again received the mumbled answer:

"Why don't you speak plainly?" he demanded to know. "What have you in your mouth?"

"Wu-m-s!—wu-m-s for fish!" replied the boy.

"And that," said Stockton to his editor, "is what I call warrant for the expression 'baited breath.'"

Faithful to the Last.

In many Scotch families the old manservant is a permanent institution. He enters the service of a family when he is a boy, sticks to his place and resigns only when the infirmities of age are upon him. Naturally he grows in time to claim as rights what were at first granted him as favors and if he is opposed asserts himself with a spirit of independence. An English paper tells a story illustrative of this.

A lady's coachman, a crusty old fellow, who had been in the service of the family in her father's time, gave her great trouble and annoyance on several occasions by not carrying out her instructions. At length his conduct became unbearable, and she determined to dismiss him. Calling him into her presence, she said with as much asperity as she could command:

"I cannot stand this any longer, John. You must look out for another situation. You will leave my service at the end of the month."

The old servant looked at her in amusement for a minute, and then the characteristic "loyalty" came to the surface.

"Na, na, my lady," he said. "I drove you to the kirk to be baptized, I drove you to your marriage, and I'll stay to drive you to your funeral."

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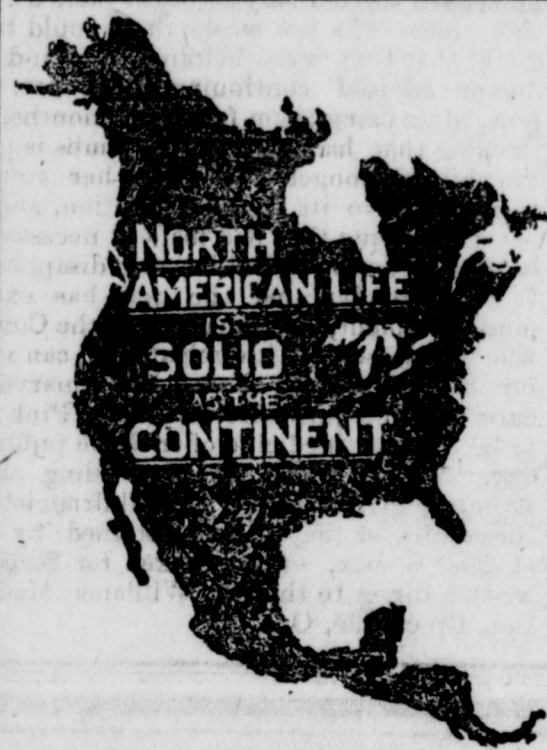
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