

THE PRODIGAL'S CHRISTMAS

The young man walked wearily along the village street until he came to the Walton cottage. There he paused, and leaned on the ramshackle paling-fence. Old man Walton, seated in the doorway, peered out at him drowsily, and then with dawning recognition he raised his rugged gray brows in surprise.

"Well, ef it hain't Alex!" he exclaimed. "By Jinks, we wasn't lookin' fer you to turn up! Home fer Christmas, I reckon."

"Yes, I sorted 'lowed I'd like to spend it heer, ef you-all don't keer," and the young man moved along to the sagging gate, passed through, and extended his hand to his uncle.

"How's the folks?" "Oh, 'bout as common," drawled the old man, with a grin. "When things is common with common folks I reckon they are common enough. Yore brother Bill's crep missed in the fall, an' he's been as ill as snake ever sence. He was hardly fit to live with as it was. You know that."

Alex Walton sat down on the door-step and crossed his thin hands between his legs. His coat was threadbare, his trousers frayed at the ankles; he looked as if he were very tired. He was clean-shaven, and had a handsome face and a clear, jovial eye.

"Bill an' Mary hain't got married yet?" he said, tentatively. "Seems to me I heard they hadn't."

"No, not edactly," replied the old man, drawing on his long, yellowish-gray beard. "But that hain't Bill's fault. He certainly has tried hard enough to fetch it to a head. I reckon he wants to take charge o' Mary's farm an' do a husband's duty in collectin' the rents an' puttin' 'em whar they'll be safe. Lawdy me! young man, that's whar you dropped yore 'lasses cand, as the feller said. That was a time she'd 'a' tuck you at the drap o' a hat, but you kept gittin' criffin'er an' triflin'er, till the gal jest had to listen to the advice o' friends. I reckon you're as fond o' liquor as ever."

The young man lowered his head until it rested on his quivering hands. He flushed red.

"I reckon I am, Uncle Joe," he said, softly. "I—I started to say I'd swore off, but I remember I did that so many times without stickin' to it that this time I won't make so many promises."

"You're a-goin' to quit, an' then swear off that's the idee," smiled the old man. "That's about it, Uncle Joe."

Just then Bill Walton slouched down the street from the direction of the village post-office, and entered the gate. He scowled when he saw his brother, and stood facing him for a moment. Alex Walton stood up, and extended his hand. "How are you, Bill?" he said, gently.

But Bill Walton, a tall, gaunt man with a hard, sallow face, was not in a good humor. "I'd like to know what you are heer fer!" he growled, holding his hand behind him.

"Let's not have another row, Bill," said the younger brother. "The Lord knows I've been sorry enough 'bout the last one. The truth is, I've come back to try to make up with you an' do better. I've been over at Darley; I got that fur lookin' fer land to rent fer the spring. I've got my eye on a good tract, an' a man over thar has agreed to back me once more. I felt so good over his faith in me an' the outlook fer the future that I tuck a notion I'd like to spend this Christmas at home. Lord, I've been lonely since I seed you-all—lonely ain't the name fer it; an' to-day it seemed to come down on me like a thick fog, an' I had to come."

"I reckon you want to celebrate the day by lyin' up drunk like you did the last time," snarled Bill Walton. "I tell you I've had enough o' your 'round heer. Uncle Joe knows—"

"Don't fetch me into it," said the old man, uncrossing his short, thick-set legs. "I won't take part either side; but I'll say this to you, Bill Walton, Alex thar is as nigh akin to me an' my wife as you are. You hain't a-payin' board heer that I know of, an' you shan't abuse Alex under my roof. You are a-startin' this heer row, ef I'm any judge o' starts. Alex has acted like a gentleman—an' a good un at that—sence the minute you opened that gate. Some folks say he's more o' a gentleman, anyway, an' you'd better not let 'em say you hain't no claim to the title at all."

Bill Walton growled out an inaudible reply of some sort, and with a heavy, clattering tread he entered the cottage, and made his way to the back entry to get a drink of water from the bucket on the shelf.

The old man laughed knowingly as he looked over his shoulder after him.

"He hain't never got over Mary's fancy fer you," he said. "Hah, that rangles!"

Alex Walton fixed the genial old face with a piercing stare. "You don't mean that, Uncle Joe," he said under his breath; "you don't think that's the reason Bill—"

"O' course it is," declared the old farmer. "She won't let nobody run you down, an' he knows it. Lordy, ef she'd 'a' been lookin' on jest now he'd 'a' shook hands readily enough. Yes, yore cake was purty well cooked two year ago, but that prolonged

spree an' poker-playin' an' all combined turned it to flat, seggy dough ag'in. Bein' a rail good friend o' her'n, an' havin' promised 'er ma on 'er death-bed that I'd sorter look after Mary, I couldn't advise the gal to resk you."

"But—you did advise 'er to take Bill?" ventured the young man, tremulously. "Well, I did an' I didn't," said the old man, reflectively. "I showed 'er both sides o' the matter, an' told 'er to take 'er choice. I told 'er he'd never let 'er starve to death, beca'se Bill believes in feedin' his stock well, an' that with his batch o' land hitched on to her'n he could sorter make out. But I told 'er she'd have to live with Bill, an' ef she begun that she'd not keer much whether she starved or not."

It was growing dusk. Some small boys were making a big bonfire down at the meeting-house, and older boys and men were firing guns and pistols and exploding fire-crackers.

"Goin' to have a Christmas tree at the meetin'-house, I reckon," said Alex, softly.

"Yes, fer the Sunday-school children an' anybody else that wants to hang on anything. Bring anything fer Mary?"

"Yes; I fetched a few little tricks, Uncle Joe. I never like to come without some present or other. Whar is she—whar is Mary?"

"I reckon she's back in the kitchen helpin' the old woman at the cooking'. They've been bakin' all day—got the fattest turkey-gobbler you ever laid eyes on; had to cook him by sections, an' lop off chunks, o' fat to keep him from swimmin' in his own grease. Thar's Mary now, lightin' the lamp."

Alex Walton turned into the sitting-room, and approached the tall, rather pretty girl in the lamp-light at the centre-table.

"Howdy, Mary," he said, softly, a tremulous note in his voice.

"Howdy do, Alex," she answered, giving him her hand, and looking down. There was a round, full accent of gladness in her tone, which she seemed to be trying to subdue. "Home for Christmas?"

"Yes," he answered, awkwardly, as he released her hand. "I got as fur as Darley lookin' fer land to rent fer next spring, an' it sorter went agin the grain to lie up thar amongst plumb strangers with you an' all the rest so ligh. So I walked over heer. I didn't feel edactly right 'bout—'bout comin', after the way I acted last Christmas, but I done it anyway."

The girl said nothing. She had not adjusted the lamp-chimney properly, and she bent to fix it. When she drew herself up erect he saw her face full in the light, and its beauty and a certain quality it seemed to mirror struck him like a blow.

"I acted bad—bad—bad!" he blurted out suddenly, his voice sounding harsh and blunt in the still room. "When I went away from heer it was with the best intention to quit my bad habits an' settle down. I 'lowed I could do it, an'—an' maybe I could 'a' done it sooner but fer one thing. I got to thinkin' 'bout you an' Bill an' his determination to marry you, an' knowin' that he never failed to gain his point, I got reckless. Somehow I jest can't git used to that—oh, my God, I can't—I jest can't!"

The eyes of the speaker met the mild, half-frightened stare of the girl, and the two stood in silence for a moment. She broke it suddenly.

"I couldn't marry a drinkin' man, Alex," she said, with a gulp. "I'd be miserable. No, I couldn't tie myself to a drinkin' man, no—no matter how much I—I loved him."

There was something in her eyes like springing tears as she left him and turned into the kitchen. His aunt, a portly old woman with a kindly face and gentle voice, came in and greeted him with a hearty, motherly shake of the hand. "I'm right glad you come home," she declared. "But, Alex, you mustn't spile all our fun an' git on another spree—you mustn't do that."

"I'm not a-goin' to do it, Aunt Maria," he said, sheepishly. "The truth is, I've—but I'm goin' to show you that I can be a man. I won't make any promises, but you'll see."

The old woman laughed incredulously, and went back to the kitchen.

"Alex is throwin' out hints that he's quit liquor," she said to the girl, who stood over the cooking-stove. "Somehow, I like the way he talks 'bout it. Do you reckon he could? I reckon it's got 'bout as big a hold on him as it ever had on anybody."

"He may mean it this time," said the girl, avoiding the old woman's eyes. "He looks different—like he'd been sick a long time, or—"

"Or had some deep trouble," put in Mrs. Walton when Mary paused for the lack of the proper word. "I tuck notice o' that, an' somehow I wanted to hug him. He always could git next to me, anyway. Bill's the safest o' the two, but la me! ef I was on my dyin' bed, an' couldn't see but one of 'em, I'd rather have Alex come to me half drunk, with that sweet, comfortin' smile o' his'n, than his brother as sober as a judge."

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The Croup

Any of the children ever have it? Then you will never forget it, will you? Don't let it go until midnight again, but begin treatment during the evening, when that dry, hollow, barking cough first begins.

Get out your Vapo-Cresolene (for you surely keep this in the house), put some Cresolene in the vaporizer, light the lamp beneath, and let the child breathe-in the quieting, soothing, healing vapor. There will be no croup that night. If it's midnight, and the croup is on, inhaling the vapor will break the spasm and bring prompt relief.

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JOHN MERRITT, M.D., of Brooklyn, in the N. Y. Medical Record.

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HER HUSBAND WAS A DRUNKARD

A Lady who cures her husband of his Drinking Habits writes of her struggle to save her home

A PATHETIC LETTER



"I had for a long time been thinking of trying the Tasteless Samaria Prescription treatment on my husband for his drinking habits, but I was afraid he would discover that I was giving him medicine, and he thought unnerver me. I hesitated for nearly a week, but one day when he came home very much intoxicated and his week's salary nearly all spent, I threw off all fear and determined to make an effort to save our home from the ruin I saw coming, at all hazards. I sent for your Tasteless Samaria Prescription, and put it in his coffee as directed next morning and watched and prayed for the result. At noon I gave him more and also at supper. He never suspected a thing, and I then boldly kept right on giving it regularly, as I had discovered something that set every nerve in my body tingling with hope and happiness, and I could see a bright future spread out before me—a peaceful, happy home, a share in the good things of life, an attentive, loving husband, comforts and everything else dear to a woman's heart; for my husband had told me that whiskey was vile stuff and he was taking a dislike to it. It was only too true, for before I had given him the full course he had stopped drinking altogether, but I kept giving him the medicine till it was gone, and then sent for another lot, to have on hand if he should relapse, as he had done from promises before. He never has and I am writing you this letter to tell you how thankful I am. I honestly believe it will cure the worst cases."

HER FATHER WAS A DRUNKARD

A Plucky Young Lady takes on Herself to Cure her Father of the Liquor Habit.

STORY OF HER SUCCESS.



A portion of her letter reads as follows:—"My father had often promised mother to stop drinking, and would do so for a time but then returned to it stronger than ever. One day after a terrible spree, he said to us: 'It's no use. I can't stop drinking.' Our hearts seemed to turn to stone, and we decided to try the Tasteless Samaria Prescription, which we had read about in the papers. We gave him the remedy, entirely without his knowledge, in his tea, coffee, or food regularly, according to directions, and he never knew he was taking it. One package removed all his desire for liquor, and he says it is now distasteful to him. His health and appetite are also wonderfully improved, and no one would know him for the same man. It is now fifteen months since we gave it to him and we feel sure that the change is for good. Please send me one of your little books, as I want to give it to a friend."

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