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My Pharaoh makes a mighty good smoke for the money.

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Thornton's Chris'mus Gif

By F. B. WRIGHT

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The night was clear and cold. As John Thornton stepped out on to the main street of Silver Bow from the hot, heavy, smoke laden atmosphere of the Nevada saloon, from the rattle of chips and the whirl of the roulette wheel, the fresh, clear morning air struck into his lungs with peculiar gratefulness. The stars seemed particularly pure and radiant after the yellow oil flare he had left. He gave a sigh of satisfaction and started up the ugly, straggling street for the Eagle hotel.

Thornton had come into Silver Bow to "have fun." Out on his ranch among the foothills the stir and life of the town, the streets filled with cowboys and miners in to get their Christmas, the store windows bright with toys and trinkets, the crowded dance halls, the thronged saloons, had painted themselves in vivid and moving colors, and yet after an afternoon and night of it all he was puzzled and rather disgusted to find the pleasure already palled. There was a spirit in the air that breathed of the coming Christmas, but what availed it when there was no one to keep Christmas for—no chick nor child nor wife nor sweetheart for whom to buy presents? So ruminating, Thornton strolled slowly bedward at 2 o'clock in the morning, when other strangers in Silver Bow were at their liveliest. This for a man just off a lonely ranch and in search of pleasure argued something wrong.

And then he noticed a boy. The boy had loitered up the street just ahead of him in an objectless, purposeless way that concurred neither with the hour nor a spirit of revelry by night. He looked as if he was trying to pass the time. He hung before store windows, stopped to pet a forlorn and vagrant cat or halted before a saloon to rub the nose of a cayuse whose master was loading up within. Thornton caught up with him as he lounged in front of the Little Delmonico, staring in at the delicacies displayed to tempt the hungry passer—ham and eggs, pork and beans, little dishes of vegetables, triangles of pie. He was a slender youngster, poorly clothed, and his face was thin and pinched.

Thornton studied him carefully from his shapeless hat to the wornout, rusty shoes.

"Right nice layout they've got in here. Kind of makes a man hungry just to look at it," he said genially. "At least it does me."

The boy nodded and turned as if to move away, but Thornton put a hand

on his shoulder.

"Look a-here," he said, "what do you say to dropping in here for a little supper, you and I? I'm right hungry myself, but I just naturally hate to eat alone, and you'd be doing a big favor if you'd join me."

"I haven't any money," said the boy.

"Well, when I ask a gentleman to take supper with me I don't reckon for him to bring his bank roll along."

The boy hesitated and then followed Thornton into the room.

"A big beefsteak with bacon and fried onions on the side would about hit us, wouldn't it? And fried potatoes. That's me!" said Thornton as he gave the order to the waiter. "I certainly am glad I met up with you. I'd been mighty lonesome eating by myself. By the way, I don't know as I just got your name?"

"My name's Heywood—Clem Heywood, suh."

"From the south, I take it?"

"Yes, suh—No'th Carolina."

"I allowed you did. I'm a Carolinian myself—that is, I was twenty years ago, and I reckon the most of me is yet. It's mighty good to talk with some one from the old No'th State. I've been meaning to go back there ever since I came out, but I haven't made out to do it. All my kin are dead, and so there's nothing to go for, except that I'd like mighty well to see the cotton shining and get a bite of real co'n bread and taste some scuppernongs."

The boy listened eagerly. He came from Johnston county. Did Thornton know that county? Had he ever been on the Greensboro road? It was just off the Greensboro road that he lived—the old Heywood place—the finest place in the world. Did Thornton remember a big hip roof brick house with white pillars at the end of an avenue just after you passed Shiloh chapel?

Mr. Thornton did not, but he knew other places just like it and evinced such lively interest that the boy's talk was only broken by the arrival of the steak, not checked. He was as hungry for talk of home as he was for food, and he poured out all his pent up homesickness to the man sitting opposite. Little by little he told the tale of his wanderings since he had run away from that home, of weary tramps and stolen rides, of scanty food and casual lodging, of hard, dirty, ill paid work done to keep body and soul together and of the constant, bitter longing to see his mother again—the mother to whom he was ashamed to write.

"Your father's dead?"

"Yes, suh; died when I was five."

"And your mother's been running the plantation ever since?"

"Yes, suh. It ain't so mighty large, but it's all we had. That's one reason I ran away, so as to get rich and help her."

"She must be a right plucky lady, your mother. Does she favor you?"

"I don't know. I've got her picture here, if you'd like to see it," said the boy. He brought out a carefully wrapped up photograph from an inside pocket and showed it proudly.

"Hair brown, like yours, and curly," suggested Thornton, "and blue eyes, too, I reckon."

"Yes, suh. She's the prettiest mother you ever saw," said the boy. "I don't know any lady that can come up to her."

"She certainly is mighty fine looking," returned Thornton heartily as he handed back the picture.

He paid the bill, and the two went out into the street.

"I reckon," Thornton said, "you wouldn't mind sleeping in a real bed tonight. Well, I've got a big double bed up to the hotel, and it'll be just about a fit for us two. No, sir; I'm not going to let a guest go that way. It ain't the way we entertain our friends back home, and you've just got to come along with me."

Thornton did not sleep much that night. He lay awake to think of the home the boy described—of its big oaks and "chaney" trees, of its clean swept yard of white sand, of the negro cabins sitting in the midst of cotton fields, of the long, wailing calls of men echoing through the woods as nightfall came and the melancholy crying of the whip-poorwill in the dusk.

A great wave of homesickness swept over the man. What would he give to see it all again? And why shouldn't he? What was to hinder?

He turned and looked at the sleeping boy. "It wouldn't be a bad idea," said he thoughtfully. "I reckon she'd be right glad to see him. I certainly would like to see the meeting."

It was Christmas morning when the train at last dropped Thornton and the boy at Four Pines Station. They had telegraphed from Silver Bow they were coming, and the old, rickety carriage was waiting for them, with white wooded Peter gripping on the front seat.

"The mistis didn't like to come in because of the drinkin' an' drammin', but she says I was to bu'n the grit goin' back," he explained as they rattled out of the village.

Everything was good to Thornton on that drive. The creaking ox carts they passed, the sunbonneted women rubbing snuff at cabin doors, the thin hounds lying asleep in the sun, the rich, soft voices of the people they met; the gaunt razorbacks scuttling under the horses' hoofs, the stick and mud chimneys, the martin gourds swinging from the high poles—all gave

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him welcome home and wished him merry Christmas.

He sent the boy ahead when, at the turn of the road, the stately old white pillared house came in sight, feeling that in the greeting between mother and son there was no place for a stranger, and walked slowly up the grass grown avenue.

She and the boy were waiting for him at the gate—a slender, graceful figure she was, looking hardly old enough to be the mother of the lad beside her. As Thornton came near she ran forward and gave him her hand.

"How can I ever repay you, Mr. Thornton," she cried, "for all your kindness to my boy and for bringing him back to me?"

"I don't know as I did bring him back. It seems more like he brought me. I'd never have got started but for meeting Clem."

"But at least I can try to thank you for my 'Chris'mus gif'."

"I ought to do the thanking, ma'am. If you had seen what a lonesome, sorry Christmas I was expecting to have the night I met your boy," replied Thornton gravely—"well, I reckon you'd say it was I who got the 'Chris'mus gif'." And as events turned out it was.

A Live Topic.

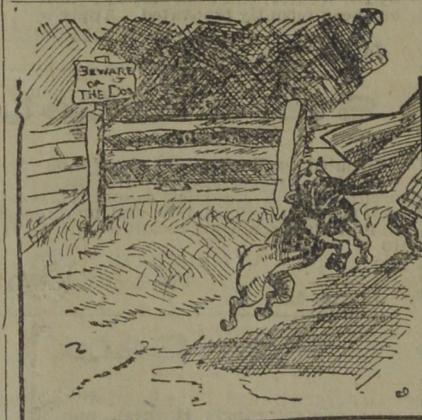
A member of the faculty of the University of Chicago tells of the sad case of a young woman from Indiana who was desirous of attaining social prominence in Chicago.

Soon after her arrival there she made the acquaintance of a student at the university to whom she took a great fancy. Evidently it was at this time that she realized for the first time her early education had been neglected, for she said to a friend:

"I suppose that, as he is a college man, I'll have to be awful careful what I say. What'll I talk about to him?"

The friend suggested history as a safe topic. To her friend's astonishment, she took the advice seriously and shortly commenced in earnest to "bone up" in English history.

When the young man called the girl listened for some time with ill concealed impatience to his talk of football, outdoor meets, dances, etc., but finally she decided to take the matter in her own hands. She had not done all that reading for nothing. So, a



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when your throat becomes clogged and your nostrils stuffed. It indicates that Catarrh has set in. You must stop this spreading disease at once or it will take dangerous forms and affect your vital organs. Negligence is the curse of mankind—many a life is lost, many a future blighted through unnecessary delay. Don't put off for tomorrow what should be done today, secure at once

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pause in the conversation showing the desired opportunity, she suddenly exclaimed, with considerable vivacity: "Wasn't it awful about Mary, queen of Scots?"

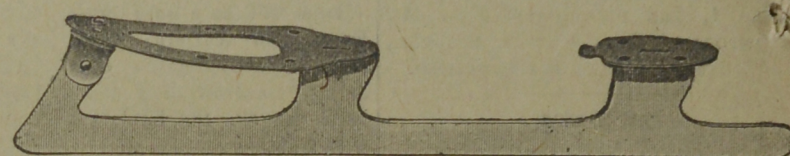
"Why, what's the matter?" stammered the student, confused.

"My gracious!" almost yelled the girl from Indiana. "Didn't you know? Why, the poor thing had her head cut off!"—Harper's Weekly.

A Painful Incident.

Two burglars broke into the house of a merchant who was generally considered to be very rich. After herculean efforts they managed to open the safe, but who can describe their disappointment when they found that it was empty and all their labor in vain? At that moment the master of the house, awakened by the noise, appeared on the scene. For a moment all three stood there as if turned to stone. The merchant was the first to come to himself.

"Gentlemen," he said, "let us all maintain a discreet silence over this incident, and now permit me to show you to the door."—Berlin Journal.



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