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THE CHRISTMAS BACKLOG

BY FRANK H. SWEET

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"POMP"

by distance, he raised his head a little and chuckled, then resumed his work, which was the driving of a large plug into the end of an immense log submerged in the water.

"O-o-o, Pomp! Massa gwine scorch you if you ain't hurry quick!" came the voice more sharply. "He say you gettin' triffin' an' no 'count."

The stone was poised for an instant, then descended with two or three deliberate taps which completed the work. Pomp examined the end of the log critically. The plug was driven in level with the rest of the wood, so that to an average observer there was no sign that it had been tampered with. Even Pomp seemed satisfied, for he chuckled again and started back in a leisurely way toward the quarters.

As he passed among the cabins on his way to the big house he met a

you're a trusty enough fellow in other ways, you're a past master at shirking when it comes to work. And through all these six weeks you have made that backlog bear the burden of your misdeeds. Even a lazy boy ought to cut a log in half a day."

"It's—it's in de cypress swamp now, massa."

"Well, I sent Tom straight to the swamp after you," looking at him keenly. "How did you miss him?"

"Reckon we both come t'other way 'bout, massa, an' didn't see neither of us," Pomp answered frankly. "But I 'low I better hurry right back an' find dat Tom. He's such a scare body he 'bout holler 'round' in de swamp all night an' git lost an' mebbe break his voice. I go right now."

"No, I think you'd better stay here, Pomp," Colonel Belknap said blandly. "Now that I've caught you I shall keep you. I'm going to lock you into the harness room and keep you there until the last buckle is cleaned and polished. Once you get out of my sight I can't expect to see you again until every string on your banjo is broken and the last possum in the woods caught."

Pomp showed his teeth; then his face sobered. "Don't you believe dat, massa," he said earnestly. "Mebbe I's light headed an' quick headed, but I ain't no runabout dat don't care for his own massa, de bes' in de worl'. Jes' soon's dat backlog burns out I's gwine be ready for work, an' you ain't need call me."

"Well, I hope you will, Pomp," more kindly. "Last Christmas the backlog burned a week, only going out on the



TWICE POMP CAME BACK WITH HIS ARMS FULL.

down or more stalwart young fellows. They grinned at sight of Pomp. "So Tom done foun' you!" one of them jeered. "You better run 'long faster 'n dat, for massa been 'quire for you a plumb hour."

"Dat show my 'portance," said Pomp composedly. "But you mistake 'bout Tom findin' me. He down there yet an' shoutin' hisse' 'n'se. I come 'round 'bout way, so he ain't see me. Exercise good for Tom, an' he ain't dar' come back till he find me. An', ob, say, Mose! De backlog's ready. De top jes' touch out de water. Dat show it soak plumb smack all de way 't'rou'. Dat log burn two whole weeks shore."

"Huh! Huh!" scoffed several of the hands. "Who ever hear backlog burn over one week?"

"Plenty people gwine hear it dis year," declared Pomp. "You know we hab holiday jes' long 's de backlog burn."

Colonel Belknap was on his veranda smoking when Pomp approached him, cap in hand.

"Hello, you black rascal!" he said explosively. "So you're here at last. Why didn't you come when Tom first called you?"

"Call me?" innocently. "I declar' I ain't seen Tom dis day. Where he call me at?"

"Everywhere, I imagine," dryly. "I've been hearing his voice yelling your name for the last hour, and loud enough to be heard two miles off. Where have you been?"

"Workin' at de backlog, massa. You know you tol' me."

"Yes, told you six weeks ago that you might get the backlog because, though

seventh day. Even the greenest, most cross grained log of black oak wouldn't be apt to burn that long behind a good fire. It struck me the log might have been soaking in water for some time. Do you think your log will burn a week, Pomp?"

"Why—er—yes, massa, I spects it will," Pomp confessed, "an'—an' mebbe a little more. But you said las' year dat you liked it an' 'jyed it much as we all."

"So I did, Pomp, and I hope the log will burn its full week, and I shall not ask any of you to do a hand turn of work except the necessary chores until it burns out. But I hope on the Mon-



COLONEL BELKNAP.

any way, you will be ready to strike that railroad work heartily. What do the boys think of it?"

"'Bout you hirin' us out to dig on de new railroad bed, massa? Well, I reckon dey favors it a heap. Massa Ben Cudder, on deriber plantation, gwine hire out 500 han's to de railroad boss."

"So I hear. But that will take every man, woman and child on his plantation who is strong enough to lift a shovel. I don't quite like that. I shall only hire out the able-bodied men for whom I have no work on the plantation just now, and none of them need go against his will. I think we can muster about 300, Pomp, and I want you all to feel it will be partly for your own interest. Half the money I receive from the railroad will be used in rebuilding the cabins at the quarters. I hope you will be able to make your log burn out its full week and that you will be ready for the contract work the following Monday. This contract means a— He stopped abruptly and turned away, apparently forgetful of his threat to lock Pomp in the harness room."

But Pomp had no intention of benefiting by the omission. As he went chuckling toward the room his thoughts were on the absurdity of the log burning out in one week. "If he'd done said 'bout two Mondays ahead he'd come closer," he muttered gleefully. "Jes' a week ain't make no difference 'bout de railroad work, an' ob co'se dem cabins is plenty good for we all to sleep in."

Five evenings later most of the negroes were gathered at the big house.

Until the time of Peter the Great the Aleutian Islands were unknown. The famous Russian monarch, consumed with curiosity as to the distance between Asia and America, started, in 1725, the first of the expeditions that at last revealed those haunts of the bear, the beaver, the ermine and the seal. But Captain Cook told more about the islands than did all the Russian explorers before him.



"LOOK HEAR, YOU STORY TELLER."

spect. Colonel Belknap, too, glanced frequently at the log, but in his glances were trouble and apprehension.

It was an open Christmas, and the great blaze in the fireplace made it necessary to throw wide the doors and windows. Among the negroes who lingered about the open doorway was a slim, furtive eyed fellow, a visitor from the Cudder plantation.

"You shoredy did fin' a good backlog when you hunted dat chunk," he said to Pomp. "I reckon it gwine las' 'bout two more weeks."

"I reckon," Pomp acquiesced laconically. He did not like the fellow.

"An' you all ain't gwine work on de railroad till it burns out?"

"Dat's right," Pomp said, and he could not forbear adding, "You Cudder boys gwine start in dis nex' Monday, I hear."

The fellow scowled. "Dat's nuffin'," he retorted. "We all ain't scared to work, an' 'sides, it's you Belknap boys dat's gwine to do de cryin'. I hear your massa in tight place, an' if he ain't raise money soon somethin' gwine be sol'. I 'low dat 'bout fifty ob you black boys be sol' down de ribber, an' case it gwine be de fines' ones, like Pomp an' Mose. He, he!"

"Look heah, you story-teller," began Pomp hotly, but the fellow snuffed.

"It's all de trufe," he declared. "I hear Massa Cudder say so hisself. If your fin' massa ain't get dis railroad work, somethin' gwine be sol' up sure. An' case he ain't get de work, for de railroad boss say he take nobody dat ain't start in on Monday, an' your big city massa ain't able to start you in till dat log burn out. He, he! You do mighty good job for Massa Cudder, Pomp, when you fin' dat log. You gib him all de railroad work. Your massa!"

His sentence was suddenly cut short for Pomp had him by the shoulders and sent him spinning down the steps. "Dat Cudder done sent him here to spy 'round," muttered Pomp. "Dey's bofe dat mean. I seed it in de feller's eyes."

Pomp went straight to Colonel Belknap, who was standing by a window, looking gloomily out at the darkness. "You like for we all to start on de railroad work Monday, massa?" he asked in a low voice.

"Can't do it, Pomp," a little drearily. "The boys won't consent till the log burns out, and that is good for another week at least."

"I 'know 'bout dat, massa," Pomp whispered confidentially. "You see, logs like dat fuss an' fuss till dey's warm an' dry all de way 't'rou', den dey jes' flare up quick like powder. I spects dat log gwine burn out 'fore Monday."

That night, after the whole house was asleep, Pomp raised a window and stepped into the living room softly. An hour was spent at the fireplace, where the great log smoldered dully. Twice Pomp went to the window and came back with his arms full. Then he stole out, closing the window noiselessly behind him. An hour later there was such a roaring and crackling in the great fireplace as to waken several of the house servants and bring them and Colonel Belknap into the room. The fireplace was a lurid mass of roaring flames.

"Well, well!" Colonel Belknap ejaculated at length, with a long breath. "Pomp was right about its starting up like powder. But why?"

Monday morning 300 stalwart negroes filed away from the Belknap plantation toward the new railroad where work was to begin. But it was not until the work was completed and all the gloom gone from Colonel Belknap's face that one day he caught Pomp by himself and collared him.

"Now, you young rascal," he said, "tell me about that backlog."

"Well, den," Pomp said desperately, as he found he could not escape, "I jes' had a holler in de log full ob water, wid twenty holes all 'round' for de water to seep 't'rou' an' keep tings damp. Co'se de fire couldn't burn good."

"But about its starting up?" Again Pomp tried to squirm away, but in vain. "I—I jes' slipped in de winder dat night an' took de plugs out an' jammed de log tight wid fat pitch wood," he stammered. "Co'se de log had to burn den. Dat was all."

Colonel Belknap released him. "No, not quite all, Pomp," he said thoughtfully. "The burning out of the log meant deliverance from ruin. You are a graceless scamp; Pomp, but next Christmas, if all goes well, you shall make the backlog burn for two weeks."

The Aleutian Islands. Until the time of Peter the Great the Aleutian Islands were unknown. The famous Russian monarch, consumed with curiosity as to the distance between Asia and America, started, in 1725, the first of the expeditions that at last revealed those haunts of the bear, the beaver, the ermine and the seal. But Captain Cook told more about the islands than did all the Russian explorers before him.

OLD LINTY WASH CLOTHS.

Should Not Be Used in Houses Where There Is Plumbing.

Few things clog a waste pipe so readily as lint. Old scrub cloths and wash cloths are apt to shed lint and thread. These, going down the waste pipes with refuse water, are apt to cling and twist around the joints. They attach to themselves all small particles that but for them would pass through the pipe. Well worn linty scrubbing cloths should not be used in a house where there is plumbing. Dishcloths also, as soon as they become linty, should be destroyed. Washtubs are apt to become either wholly or partially stopped up where there is much lint from the articles washed in them. Because the refuse pipe of the sink is large tea leaves and coffee grounds are often disposed of by emptying them down it. There are a great many cases where no harm ever results from this practice, but it is better not to do it. In a household where the sink became stopped recently the plumbers, when they took the pipes to pieces, found the trouble due entirely to the gradual accumulation of coffee and tea grounds. Before the repairs were completed the plumber's bill amounted to a considerable sum.

Grease from dishwater is also apt to accumulate in time and harden in the pipes. After pouring greasy water or anything that has grease particles in it down the sink pour boiling water and salsoda after it. Cold water carelessly thrown down helps to harden the grease that has gone before it.—New York Tribune.

BUYING A CLOCK.

Select One That Will Harmonize With Its Surroundings.

When you've a clock to buy choose it with an eye to its playing a part, no matter how small that part may be, in the furnishing of the particular room it is for.

Crystal clocks in one form or another come to suit almost every sort of room—stunning circular ones, with their tiny floors paved with colored enamels in mosaic patterns, for parlor or drawing room; plain as a pipstern kinds, with a world of dignity in their very plainness, for library or music room, and dainty little forms for bedroom or boudoir.

For sitting rooms the colonial clocks—mahogany cases, left almost plain to show off the beauty of the wood—are particularly good.

Attractive bronze clocks and pretty ones of china, usually Dresden, and a thousand and one others more elaborate in style, including profusely, some of them, even in ornament, may seem to suit the particular corner. Only be sure that the one you pick does suit it so well that it is hard to imagine any other clock in its place.

A well chosen clock is as great a relief and pleasure to the eye as a vase or a bit of bric-a-brac.—Exchange.

REMARKABLE OPINIONS.

Irish Particularly Prone to "Break Down" Mentally.

A special report of the inspector of lunatics in Ireland was issued the other day in the form of a blue book. It shows that the proportion of insane to the total population in 1901 was 56.2 per 1,000, compared with 15.3 in 1851. The number of patients in public asylums rose from 8,667 in 1890 to 13,332 in 1895, and 18,094 in 1901. There was a proportionate increase in the inmates of private asylums. The figures do not include the insane outside of asylums, which is believed to be considerable.

The inspectors attribute the increase in the ratio of insanity to population partly to the reduction of the latter by emigration of the mentally fit and partly to the return to Ireland of emigrants suffering from mental breakdown. Available statistics do not permit of a definite conclusion as to whether there has been an actual increase in insanity, but the inspectors believe that but for the emigration of the strong and healthy the ratio would have been very small.

They declare, however, that the Irish are "peculiarly prone to mental breakdown," directing attention to America, where, they say, the proportion of insane among the Irish is greatly in excess of other nationalities, and pointing out that in Connecticut it is more than double.

Caution is enjoined against the danger of hastily drawing conclusions from returns as to numerical increase which may be influenced by many factors, as, for example, the widening of the medical opinion as to the degree of insanity, justifying certification and transfer to institutional care.

In conclusion the report says that the question of the influence of emigration on the development of insanity has not hitherto received the attention it deserves, adding: "There is every reason to fear that a large number of our people crossing the Atlantic in search of fortune in a climate and environment so different from that to which they are accustomed leave behind them the good humor and peace of mind so happily characteristic of our peasantry, and in the strain and stress of American life, and especially of American city life, quickly break down physically and mentally. Of the large number who become insane many, the hunted animals, seek to return to their friends and former homes in Ireland, while those unable to return find refuge in the lunatic asylums of America."

On the Safe Side.

Schroeder (to his neighbor, a widower)—Why did you send your housekeeper away, since she was such a good cook? The Widower—She made such splendid puddings I was afraid I should marry her.

A cubic foot of distilled water weighs very nearly 1,000 ounces.