

THE FRONT ROOM.

(BY MARGUERITE M'PIECE.)

(For The Courier.)

"There's no use in your going on like that, Sammy, for I'm not going to take you. Your Pa and me will be on the go all day, and we can't have you hanging on fretting and whining when you get tired. Nor I'm not going to take you along and leave you at Cousin Sarah's to plague the life out of her. So just hush up, and help sister pack them pies and things into that basket for Cousin Sarah."

The speaker was a pleasant-faced woman of about forty. Her square chin and the firm set of her rather large mouth added emphasis to the words which seemed to convince the whimpering little boy that teasing was useless, for, as his mother left the room, he wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his pink shirt, and, going over to the table, began to gather up the remains of the breakfast as a pretense of helping his sister, Martha.

When Mrs. Fisk came into the kitchen again Martha was laughing at the picture Sammy made as he stood with his feet far apart and his curly head tipped back while he drained a few drops of syrup from one of the breakfast plates. She smiled, glad that the cloud had passed so quickly; then, while she put on her bonnet before the glass that hung over the kitchen sink, she gave her final directions.

"Martha, you be sure and shut the hen-house door before dark, and help Abe with the chores. You can have that pumpkin pie that's in the pantry for your dinner—and there's cold meat, and heat up some of those potatoes. You'd better not boil fresh ones for you peel too thick. Land! There's your Pa driving up to the door, and I haven't got all my traps together. Martha, what did you do with that string that measures the front windows? I want those curtains to be good and long. Oh! here it is in my bag. Sammy, run into the pantry and fetch a glass of that plum jelly. I want Cousin Sarah to try it."

While Mrs. Fisk was crowding the jelly into an already well filled basket, the door opened and a tall, angular man entered.

"Most ready, Mary?" he said, as he pushed his cap back, revealing a mop of thick, brown hair, and stroked his sandy beard with one broad, rough hand. Then seeing the basket, his small, blue eyes twinkled, but he said nothing as he picked it up and carried it out to the lumber wagon. His wife followed, and when he helped her up she peered over the seat and said, "What have you under that horse blanket, Pa?"

"Oh, I thought I'd take Cousin Sarah one of those new hams," he answered.

"You never said anything about it," his wife rejoined. "There now, I left my bag. Martha, you get it, and bring my heavy shawl from the front room. It's colder out than I thought for."

Then, seating herself comfortably on the wide seat of the high wagon, she said to her husband:

"I haven't taken a real good look at the house since you finished painting. But I like that color after all, though I did think brown was about the best."

The house was a small, two story one, with a wing kitchen running back. A ladder spattered with fresh, yellow paint leaned up against the side of the house, and under the porch there was a pile of pieces of wood and shavings.

"My! but I do take enough comfort out of that back porch to pay for the lumber in it a dozen times over," Mrs. Fisk said as Martha handed her the bag and shawl, and her husband gathered up the reins.

"Now, Sammy, be a good boy and mind sister. Abe, you be careful when

you do the chores; and Martha don't set the chimney afire with one of your big blazes."

The three children shouted a chorus of good byes. Martha, the twelve year old house keeper, waving the dish cloth as she danced a jig on the porch till the boiler fell down from the washing machine.

"My sakes, I hope those children won't tear the house down," Mrs. Fisk said to her husband.

"Drive slow, pa," she continued as they turned out of the yard onto the road that ran past the house. "I want to get a good look at those front windows. Yes, I knew I'd like the thin white best. Mrs. Harter's got some kind of striped silk at hers, but it ain't as fresh looking."

By this time they had passed the house and the horses were started on a steady trot. The fresh morning air was fast being filled with a smoky haze that colored the rolling prairies with purple tints, and changed the bright yellow of the far distant corn fields to a deep gold. Farmer Fisk looked from the fields of his own dusty corn stalks on either side of the road to the golden glory of his neighbors farther on, and then said aloud: "Well, most everything in this world's beautiful if you only get on the right side of it."

"What did you say, pa?" his wife asked. Then without waiting for an answer, she continued:

"I've been thinking we'd better get that book case, then your books will be handy and out of the dust without having to go to the box every time you want them. But I do want a red plush sofa for the front room terribly bad." Then, after a moment. "Maybe we can do with a couple less rocking chairs."

Mr. Fisk tickled the horses with the whip tassel, pushed his cap back, cleared his throat, and said:

"You can have the sofa and chairs both, Mary, I sold the red heifer."

"What, Bee! I thought you wanted to keep her."

"Yes," answered Mr. Fisk slowly, "I want Abe to care for books, and I thought mebbe seeing them round would help some."

"Land, pa! How ever did you do it without my knowing," said Mrs. Fisk as soon as she recovered from her astonishment.

It was almost noon when Mr. and Mrs. Fisk drove into Beatrice and stopped before a house on one of the side streets. A white haired, old woman in brown alpaca came out to meet them. She kissed Mrs. Fisk and led her into the house, as an old man in blue jeans came up and grasped Mr. Fisk's hand. "I'm real glad to see you, Dick," he said, "real glad." In the house Mrs. Fisk was saying:

"Now, Cousin Sarah, you mustn't make any extra for us. I just brought along something, and let me help you set things on while we visit."

Cousin Sarah consented, and the two women moved about the spotless kitchen talking pleasantly.

"How is Annie getting on?" Mrs. Fisk asked after a pause in the conversation. "I haven't seen you but once since Frank died."

Cousin Sarah was frying the potatoes and she did not answer at once but stood with the fork in one hand and the tin lid of the potato pot in the other. The steam pouring out hid her face. When at last she covered the potatoes and put the fork on the table, she went to the kitchen roller and wiped her eyes before speaking.

"Poor Annie's having a hard time I'm afraid, Mary," and the old woman's voice quivered. "She writes real brave, but where she is it's hard to get work."

"What is she working at?" asked Mrs.

Fisk in a voice softer than her usual tone.

"Sewing, or any thing she can get," was the answer. "But most of the folks make their own clothes, or go to the city and have them made at the shops. Annie never was strong."

Her voice broke, and she raised a corner of her apron to her eyes.

Mrs. Fisk's own cheeks were wet, and she fumbled in the folds of her dress for her handkerchief.

After a few minutes Cousin Sarah continued. "If Annie were only here, Hiram and me could help her some. She wouldn't have rent to pay, and little Frank could get steady work at Be-goles doing up bundles."

"Don't she want to come?" Mrs. Fisk asked as Cousin Sarah stopped.

"Oh! my! She'd come quick enough if she had the money, poor child! But it's all she can do to feed the children, let alone laying by fifty dollars to come on."

"Would it cost all that?" Mrs. Fisk asked in astonishment.

"Yes, counting what she run behind when Frank was sick. She wouldn't come away without paying that."

Mrs. Fisk set a plate of bread on the table, and smoothed a wrinkle out of the cloth. For once her ready tongue was silenced; and she did not seem able to think of any thing to say. Cousin Sarah drained the potato water into the dish pan and set the pot on the stove. Then she said: "Hiram and me have all we need, but since the Ellis bank failed it's hard for us to lay our hands on ready money. We're saving bit by bit; but it's slow, terrible slow, and the winter's coming on."

As she finished speaking, Cousin Sarah placed a last doughnut on the little pyramid piled in the centre of the table, and carried the empty jar into the pantry; she was gone some time and the boiling of the tea kettle sounded loud in the still room.

Mrs. Fisk looked out of the window and saw her husband and Cousin Hiram walking across the yard. She saw past them. Her own well built home rose before her eyes, in all the glory of its new paint concealing completely the old made over part. She saw her unfurnished front room, and heard the children romping on the bare floor as they often did on rainy days. An exclamation from Cousin Sarah brought her back to the present in time to hear the words:

"It's such a comfort, Mary, to tell you, but I don't mean to spoil your visit."

Mrs. Fisk made some indistinct reply just as her husband and Cousin Hiram came into the kitchen. Cousin Sarah dished up the dinner and they all sat down.

"Well, Dick, you must have quite a house down your way now," Cousin Hiram said, as he covered a generous helping of meat and potatoes with thick, brown gravy, and passed the plate to Mrs. Fisk. "I was down when you were moving back the old part for the kitchen. Did it fix up all right?"

"Yes, yes, pretty fair. Least ways my wife finds it a handy place to work in."

"Well yee, I do," Mrs. Fisk broke in. "And you know that plan of yours Cousin Hiram, that we put the sink on the north side so that the water would drain down the slope on to the grove? Well, Dick fixed it so, and it's saved a sight of work. But what I like most," she continued, turning towards Cousin Sarah, is the front room. You know we have two windows looking east and one on the south, and I'm going to have yellow shades with fringe and long white curtains. Mrs. Harter's got some striped silk kind, but they don't seem as fresh as the white to me. What do you think?"

"Well you know, Mary, I'm not much

for new styles," answered Cousin Sarah.

"That's what I say about most things," rejoined Mrs. Fisk. "I don't think there could be a prettier front room any where than mother's was in the old home back in Vermont. She had white curtains to all the windows, and a marble topped table in the middle of the room with the big Bible on it. My! how proud I was of the first pink and white tidy I crocheted to put under that Bible. Then on the floor underneath the table she had some big pink and white shells that Father got one time when he went over to Portland. But there's one thing that I'm going to have that Mother didn't, and that's a red plush sofa. Her's was black horse hair, and terrible slippery. Then I'll have a couple of chairs to match the sofa, and some rocking chairs. You must come down and spend a week when we get all fixed. And I'm going to have the sewing circle. And, oh! I want to ask you about the carpet, Would you have it made in the store or sew it yourself?"

Then followed a discussion as to the merits and demerits of store-made carpets which lasted until they rose from the dinner table, and Mr. Fisk told his wife that they'd better be going down town.

When they were on the street Mr. Fisk said: "Well, shall we go to the furniture store first?"

"Yes," answered his wife. "And then I want to get a few things for the children, if we can. Martha needs a couple of school aprons, and Abe's shirts are giving out. What do you think it will all come to, pa?"

"If we get everything we planned on

CHRISTMAS 1900.

For The Courier

White star, whose hundredth
rising looks tonight
Out of the old,
mysterious Orient,
Another age,
with riches redolent
Cometh, with newer gems
and lusters dight,
Bringing its store of treasure
through the night,
Another century's
long wonderment
Follows the way
the magi, marvelling, went
Follows the shepherds
to the light.

Dark faces from
the uttermost sea-isles
That never whiten
to the Christmas snow,
Dim fastness, and hoary,
vast defiles
No other century
has dared to know,
From all of these,
some seer caravan
Bringeth the offering
of men to Man.

QUATRAINS.

(BY MARTHA PIERCE.)

Now when the Old Year
droops his weary head,
And worn with labor
fain would be abed,
Detain him not for error-counting.
Let him go
And o'er his sleep the mantle of
Forgiveness spread.

So when the Young Year
lifts his shining face
It wears no dimming veil
of past Disgrace
Unfrighted by old failures,
see this flaming youth
Strong in Young Purpose,
strip him for the race.