



A Pretended Thanksgiving.

By Will Allen Dromgoole, in The Household: Aunt Emmeline got up one morning with a pain in her back. She had been busy all the week, helping the white people prepare for Thanksgiving.

"Pears like it wuzn't made for nobody but de rich nobow," she told herself, as she dragged on her old shoes and set about getting breakfast for herself and little Ephraim, the boy asleep in the bed she had just vacated.

The complaint was not made aloud; not for the world would she have permitted that boy to hear her throw a suspicion on that season which to him was one br'f' beautiful dream.

For every night when she came home to the cabin, had she entertained him with accounts of the great dinners she had been preparing and the boy had listened, and asked questions, until the wonder in his big round eyes would be quite extinguished in sleep.

For Ephraim was a cripple. I little negro with a twisted leg, and a mind as bright as the one silver dollar that had been his.

Aunt Emmeline called him her "man," for he 'll housekeeper,' when leaving the cabin mornings for her work, and promised to tell him all about Thanksgiving when she got back, "if he tended right heart in things."

All day the little face would watch at the window for her return, although she never came until the darkness had fallen and the streets were empty. Then, when they had eaten their supper, would come an hour of sweet contact to both, when the mother would take her child in her arms and tell him of the bright, beautiful world made brighter and more beautiful by the good, glad Thanksgiving.

And now it lacked but one day of Thanksgiving, and now Aunt Emmeline must be off early.

"'Nez," she called, when the coffee began to steam, "jump up now, on eat yore breakfast. Mammy got to go mighty soon. It's mighty nice Thanksgiving."

"Am I?" said Ephraim, drowsing on his covered old shoo. "Where you gwing to be today, mammy?"

"At the Mayor's, son. I got to dress dev-all's turkey today."

"W'll day hab cranberries, too, lak lawyer them, what you cooked de pie yester'day?"

"First day will, honey, dat day will. De Mayor ain't gwing to be outside to-morrow, too. I tell you, let 'em Thanksgiving."

"W'll day hab syllabub, lak Miss Tisum, too?"

"Yes, sah, en plenty ob it."

"En reasun cake, too."

"En sweet pickles, lak de preacher ob de gospel's wife?"

"Dey same, en more."

"The His round eyes grew bigger.

"Mebby dey'll hab oysters fried in cracker sauce, lak de resteran' man gwing hab?"

"Yes, sah, dey'll hab 'em, only day gwing stuff em inside de turkey."

The boy was silent for a moment; then, with a long, deep sigh:

"Mammy," said he, "I wish we could hab a Thanksgiving, too."

"Yes, mebby we kin, sometime. Jes' you be a good en tek keer de house on Ef's while mammy so work' an' mebby Thanksgiving' gwing come 'long to weal, too, some of dese days."

She didn't expect it, however; hers had been a life of hardship; romance had faded from it long ago, and lived now only in the boy.

He set himself thinking when she had left him alone. He had heard a good deal about Thanksgiving; it evidently belonged to everybody alike; therefore everybody was in duty bound to celebrate it.

As to the dinner? Well, that was a feature of the day, to be sure; but he felt equal to that, too. He was rather late beginning, with such a dinner as he meant to serve, but he would do his best. In a few minutes he was hard at work, dishes clattering, kettle singeing, spoons playing. The little cabin had seldom seen so busy a day; the town itself held not so happy a boy as little black Ephraim preparing his Thanksgiving dinner. When Aunt Emmeline, weary and footsore, dragged herself home at dark, she was greeted with the sound of singing. Ephraim's voice ringing out, not in Thanksgiving perhaps, he had never thought of that, but just in joy, and the gracious content that comes with employment and with hope. Perhaps that might be a Thanksgiving hymn after all, since "Joy is the grace we owe to God."

The cabin was ablaze with light, a rich, warm fire-glow that went out to meet her as she opened the creaky old door.

In the center of the room stood Ephraim, his back to the fire, his slight body leaning against his crutch, while he bent over something that might have been a royally spread banquet table, all the show and shine of it.

In truth, it was a big boy that had served as a sort of sideboard for dishes, tins, and water buckets, all these years.

A clean, gorgeously pictured newspaper served as a tablecloth; the dishes, both as to material and contents, were rare, as well as original. The board faintly scintillated with splendor, as the flames of the big fireplace mounted higher and higher up the black-throated chimney.

Blinded by the light, Aunt Emmeline staggered forward, when the voice of Ephraim rang out in delight, if frightened, protest:

"Look out, mammy!" he cried. "You'll smash somethin' nuther. Don't reach this here; dis here's de Thanksgiving dinner fur we-all tomorrow. Look et dat! Ain't dat fine?"

Aunt Emmeline rubbed her eyes, and straightway entered into his pleasures.

"It sho' am," said she. "It sho' am a strumous 'ession. What's hit all fur, sun?"

"Hit's dest a 'tend-like dinner, mammy," said Ephraim. "Dey ain't no sho' nuff eat'n, but it's a mighty fine 'tend-like. 'Sho' you bawn."

"I sho' spee it am," said Aunt Emmeline, as she dropped for a moment into the chimney corner to warm her feet at Ephraim's good blaze. "En we-all got to be satisfied wid hit somehow, beca'se hit's all de Thanksgiving we gwine git. De white folks dey ain't pay me much dis time; dey say dey pore, too, en of de kin git up day own dinner hit's de mos' dey kin do. But dey gib me some clothes en things. Marry's got you a god pair secon-hand breeches, en a shirt, en a coat wh'nt got nar' hole in it. De preacher ob de gospel's wife gimme dem. En I got a good hanmel poteau, what Miss Tisum gimme for whippin' up her cakes, en dressin' ob de turkey, en scourn' up de kitchen en poches. She's sort o' fractions sometimes, but she most always generous. 'Fore she done wid you, an de Mayor, he gimme a dollar; he's de bes' one in dis town. Wid dat dollar mammy gwine buy her chile a long r'crutch, en dey sin't no Thanksgiving dinner gwine git sent abit; it maw sab."

Ephraim strode over to the opposite side of the hearth, and stood contentedly looking down into the fire.

"We got poesy, anyhow," said he, after a long, thoughtful silence.

"Yes, we got some taters, en some meal for a hoe-cake; en mammy gwine stay at home all day, too."

"Hineys!" laughed the boy. "I say hoe-cake en taters! We got turkey, en pound cake, en pie, en jelly, en things, look et dat table; you forgit dat table, mammy. You forgit de 'tend-like."

There was a knock at the door that brought Aunt Emmeline to her feet in a hurry, that again endangered the Thanksgiving board.

"Lock out, mammy," Ephraim called out, sharply. "Don't catch dis here; dis here am de syllabub fur to-morrow," and he made a frantic dash for an oyster can, beautifully burnished, on top of which he had set a cracked china bowl filled to the brim with a rich yellow liquid that might indeed have been the much-coveted Southern syllabub, had it not been bowl of Aunt Emmeline's own best soft-soap.

But the woman was at the door, where a young white man stood waiting admittance, a well-dressed, good-looking young fellow, evidently used to the higher walks of life.

"Aunt Emmeline," said he, a hand on either door-facing, "mother sent me by to ask you to come over and serve dinner for her tomorrow. She says she would like you to get there early, by 5 o'clock."

Aunt Emmeline thought of her aching feet, her empty pocket, the day she had meant to have at home with Ef. The young man's mother was Lawyer Duffy's wife, and her dinners were sumptuous affairs. It would be a long, hard day's work, with perhaps a pall of odds and ends—scraps from the feast—to show for it at night. She hesitated.

"I's mighty nigh brak down," said she, at last. "En tomorrow, hit's Thanksgiving. I's done wukked all de week, mighty hard; en dey ain't nobody make me nar' cent, 'ceptin' ob de Mayor. Aide dey is mos' ob dem' gwing somethin' nuther. Yo' ma ain't knowin' nothin'."

"Twice," said Aunt Emmeline, softly.

The young man rose, a hand in either pocket.

"You haven't told me yet what thos' marbles scattered over the table mean," said he, not willing to lose one item of the strange feast.

"Dem? Dey's de good wills what dey goes long wid presents, alde dey might be unges, of dey wuzn't mables."

The reporter studied the table carefully; the "tend-like" was pretty well complete. He would like to have a part in it somehow.

"Ephraim," he said, "you need yes, I am sure you need another cake."

"Yes, sah," said Ephraim, "but dey ain't nobody lef' to gib it to me."

"Well, fix up one somehow, out of four, or dirt, or cornmeal. I don't care what, and you can say 'the reporter gave you that one!'"

"Yes, sah; I'll mek it out o' fleur, en den hit'll be a white one," said the boy, already getting out another plate.

The reporter turned to Aunt Emmeline.

"Per'f a dollar for you, Aunt Emmeline," said he, "and the next time moth'r forgets to pay you, you just come to me. You'll come tomorrow?"

"Yes, sah; I'll be da by 8 o'clock, ef de Lawd spair's me."

A moment later, the reporter was at the grocer's, whence Ephraim's imaginary donation had been sent. As he went in he met a gentleman coming out. "Mayer," he cried, "I was just going to call on you. Will you come back a moment?"

The Mayor turned back into the grocery.

"Let him alone; it pleases him to talk."

Scarcely realizing that he did so, the young man drew a chair to the improvised table, and began to ask questions of the most remarkable Thanksgiving menu on record. He was enjoying it, too, quite as much as little black Ephraim.

"What's this, Ephraim?" said the visitor, pointing to a little round upturned box in the center of the table.

"Dat's a reasun cake, what de Mayor ob de town sent me fur dinner tomorrow. 'Tis a 'tend-like cake, but I spec' hit's a reasun one."

"And don't forget to put in an orange, both of you. He said the 'unges' were 'good wills.'"

The Mayor turned to the grocer:

"When you send the rice and macaroni and sausages, send down the cake for me. Select a good one, and be sure hit has raisins in it."

"All right, Mayor," laughed the grocer. "I'll get it there by 8 o'clock tomorrow. At the door the Mayor turned back:

"I say, don't forget the oranges."

"If Thanksgiving and Christmas didn't come along in a year," he told himself as he walked toward his home. "I reckon we would all forget what it is to remember the poor. They kind o' pull us up with a half and prick at our selfish hearts, and set us thinking of others."

The reporter meanwhile was telling his story to the "pretty and genorous Miss Tisum," in her stiff little sitting room on Chestnut street.

"Send syllabub to a lazy nigger, shall I?" she snapped. "They're a disgruntled lot, I can tell you. Sylabub! Well, I reckon."

"This one isn't ungrateful," said the young man. "He said you gave him a pie once; and he declared you were a pretty, good, generous Miss Tisum."

The thin lips of the old woman came together in a smile that might have meant either a snarl or a smile.

"Defended me, I reckon," said she, "when you called me 'cross and ugly."

The reporter gasped, and absently answered, "Yes, ma'am." And the next thing he knew was he was on the pavement outside, getting away as fast as he could.

The old woman closed the door upon him and stepped over to a mirror that hung over the mantel. Then she began to laugh; and she laughed and laughed until the pale, thin cheeks grew pink in youth itself. She laughed at the negro and she laughed at the "mischin'-ry," separately and together. Then she laughed at herself and her "good, pretty, genious" record. Then she sang for the crowd.

"Can you make another bowl of that syllabub early in the morning, Mar-ha?" said she.

"Yessum; but day's enough already made for half da town."

"Then make as much for the other half, Mar-ha," said the mistress. "Mar-ha, there's some one in this town who believes that I am a 'good, pretty, genious woman,' and please God he all act discover my mistake at Thanksgiving, that's all."

The reporter realized the misfortune of his hard task. He had seen the minister's wife, that was easy enough.

"She understood and was crying a baby before I got half through," said he. "I told her, 'she, she knows what it is to be a 'begging missionary!'"

But he approached his father with some dread; he told the story then, when he was allowed no response to the tale he was telling. When he finished the attorney looked up gravely, soberly, coldly. "Well," said he, "what do you want me to do about it?"

The young man bit his lip; there were tears in his eyes.

"Nothing," said he, "nothing! I am sorry I mentioned it. Good night, sir."

"Wait," said the older man, quietly. "Where are you going?"

"To tell mother not to expect me young. I tell you this is a large, a miserable farce, in which I will take no part. Thanksgiving to rod when our own hearts are crushed with selfishness, like ice! It isn't Thanksgiving; it's nothing but selfishness, and I'm too party to it. I've got to tell her, and I'm afraid to tell her."

"Miss Tisum sent me dat," said he. "Miss Tisum? That cross, ugly, oh raid? Do you mean her?" asked the thoroughly amused reporter.

"Naw, sir," said the boy. "I mean dat party, good, genious lady what lives on the corner ob Chisholm street. Dat's one I means."

The reporter broke into a laugh. "But she wouldn't—I mean do you really think she would?" said he.

"Yes, sah, I mos' know she would. She gimme a piece o' pie en't, en one's gib mammy some buttermilk to melde up de bread wid. Didn't she, mammy?"

"Twice," said Aunt Emmeline, softly.

The young man rose, a hand in either pocket.

"You haven't told me yet what thos' marbles scattered over the table mean," said he, not willing to lose one item of the strange feast.

"Dem? Dey's de good wills what dey goes long wid presents, alde dey might be unges, of dey wuzn't mables."

The reporter studied the table carefully; the "tend-like" was pretty well complete. He would like to have a part in it somehow.

"Ephraim," he said, "you need yes, I am sure you need another cake."

"Yes, sah," said Ephraim, "but dey ain't nobody lef' to gib it to me."

"Well, fix up one somehow, out of four, or dirt, or cornmeal. I don't care what, and you can say 'the reporter gave you that one!'"

"Yes, sah; I'll mek it out o' fleur, en den hit'll be a white one," said the boy, already getting out another plate.

The reporter turned to Aunt Emmeline.

"Per'f a dollar for you, Aunt Emmeline," said he, "and the next time moth'r forgets to pay you, you just come to me. You'll come tomorrow?"

"Yes, sah; I'll be da by 8 o'clock, ef de Lawd spair's me."

A moment later, the reporter was at the grocer's, whence Ephraim's imaginary donation had been sent. As he went in he met a gentleman coming out. "Mayer," he cried, "I was just going to call on you. Will you come back a moment?"

The Mayor turned back into the grocery.

"Mayor, and Mr. Johnson, both of you, I have turned missionary."

The Mayor and the grocer smiled. "That means you are out begging!" said the former. "I believe all missionaries beg."

"For others, yes, sir. I am not precisely that sort of a missionary; but I attended a Thanksgiving dinner this evening to which you two gentlemen were both contributors. I have come in here to tell you about it."

And when the story ended the Mayor was blowing his nose with all his might.

"I reckon I am an old fool," said he. "A soft old fool; the very pickaninnies have found it out. As for you, sir, you get out here with your 'reasin' cake,' before I fine you 'for contempt!'"

The reporter went out, but he went laughing. At the door he put his head in again to say:

"And don't forget to put in an orange, both of you. He said the 'unges' were 'good wills.'"</p