MY POOR WIFE.

BY J. P. SMITH.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was dawn—a cold, misty dawn—as I stepped, with a muffled tread, to my dressing room. I stopped and looked at my sleeping wife, and, as I looked, the ghastly idea struck me that I was not looking into the features of a sleeping, but a dead woman. The stony rigid repose, the waxen color of the skin, the fixed look of pain about the drawn mouth, all seemed to confirm my fear, until, leaning closer, a faint breath fanned my cheek and she moaned feebly. I stole away, swallowed a glass of brandy, threw myself upon a couch in my dressing room and soon sank into an uneasy dose. Helen's sleeping face haunted me. I dreamt that she was lying dead on the cliff where we had so often sat together, and that when I stooped to lift her body in my arms a pair of bony hands closed fiercely round my throat, strangling my cries for mercy, dragged me to the edge of the cliff, where I fiercely struggled for my life. The hands I knew belonged to old Molly Griffin; but the face glowering over me was young William Hernshaw's, distorted with passion. At last, with a violent wrench, I freed one arm, and seizing the hand pressing my throat, awoke to find Helen leaning over me, dragging her wrist from my clutch.

I looked at her stupidly for a second.

"I—I am doing you no harm," she said, her eyes flickering and glaring at me stealthily. "I came to see why—why—you had not come to bed. Let me go, let me go, I say—you hurt me."

I at once dropped her hand, and she ran quickly away to her own room.

I did not see her again until breakfast, when she appeared in a lively, talkative mood and civilly disposed towards both Edith and me, though she never once looked us in the face, but kept her eyes almost closed or fastened to her plate. After giving some household orders she went out, and, standing by the window of my study, I watched her for some time pacing a retired corner of the kitchen garden with a swift, monotonous stride; at last the movement became so repugnant to me that, scarcely heeding what I was doing, I threw open the window and called out to her:

"Helen, I'm going to the club this morning; haven't you any shopping to do? The dog cart will be round in half an hour.

"No, none," she answered, after a moment's pause. "Besides, I have an engagement this afternoon. Ask Miss Stopford; she is sure to have some shopping to do."

She had, and we started presently, returning very hot and dusty late in the afternoon to find that Helen had failed to keep her engagement, which Edith casually informed me was a drive to the Flower Show at Briers-wood with Sir William Hernshaw.

"It was so hot, I felt too lazy to dress; I hope you had a pleasant drive," she said drowsily, her eyelashes still sweeping her cheeks.

"Almost unbearable coming back," I answered, throwing myself upon a seat by the open window. "I am nearly choked with dust; I feel I could swallow a quart of claret and soda."

"I'll get some," said Helen, going towards the dining room, and presently returning with a cool, frothing tumbler, which she handed to me and then stood behind my chair.

I turned, laid my hand on her arm, and said gently:

"Helen, tell me what is the matter with you. Why will you not look at me—wife?"

She did not move or answer a word, though I repeated my inquiry almost coaxingly, as one would question a pettish, wayward child.

I withdrew my hand and lifted, sighing wearily the glass, when suddenly, with a loud cry, she dashed it from my lips, the liquid squirting up into my face, flowing down my shirt and collar and streaming onto the carpet, where the glass lay broken.

Stung to the quick by the insulting violence of the act, I sprang to my feet, glaring speechlessly at her until Edith, whose presence I was not aware of, ran eagerly towards me and passed her handkerchief over my wet face and neck.

"How dare you?" I stammered hoarsely. "What do you mean? Are you mad?"

Helen burst into a wild, loud laugh.

"Yes, yes, mad—mad as a March hare—mad—mad—the maddest wife ever a true husband had. Oh, my poor head—my poor head—it aches—it aches! A breath of sea air would do it good—a breath of sea air!" she moaned, listlessly moving away.

I went too, for even Edie's soft touch and pitying eyes were more than I could bear. Ordering my horse, I gave him his head, rode across country as if following the swiftest hounds that ever ran a fox to earth. I knew not whither or how far I went; it was night when the poor brute, lame, footsore, crawled up the avenue again. Edith was waiting for me on the doorstep, and led me into the dining-room, where a tempting supper was laid.

"Eat, eat," she said; "you look thoroughly exhausted, poor dear."

"She," I began nervously.

"She has been perfectly quiet ever since, locked up in her room. Don't trouble about her now; she'll be all right tomorrow, you'll find. Now, dear boy, to supper, please."

The next morning I was awakened from a dreamless sleep by the housekeeper, Mrs. Murray—a valued and trusted servant who had served the family for nearly forty years—rousing me violently.

"What is it?" I asked, sitting up in my bed with a vague feeling of apprehension. "Has anything happened?"

"Hush, hush, master Paul," she said agitatedly, "we must keep it quiet as long as we can. Something has happened. She has gone."

"My wife?"

"Yes, when I went into her room this morning I found it empty and the bed not slept in; she is not in any part of the house grounds. That is all I can tell you."

Urging her to keep the other servants in ignorance if possible, I dressed hurriedly, and, my mind distracted with wrath, suspicion, vague terror and jealousy, sought in vain for any trace of my unfortunate wife. She had disappeared completely, without leaving a note or message; no one had seen or heard her quit the house, and, after a guarded inquiry at the station, I ascertained that she had not been observed by either guards or station-master taking any of the morning or late night-trains. Towards mid-day, feverish with anxiety, entirely baffled, I returned home. Calling Mrs. Murray, I begged her to get by portmanteau ready, as I was leaving at once.

"Where to—what are you going to do—tell me, Master Paul?" she pleaded, with a shaking voice.

"I'm going after him," I answered chokingly; "don't bother me, woman, but get my things—quick!"

"Him—who's him?"

"Hernshaw; he left the Grange last night."

"Well, well, sir you know your own business best; but I think you're going on a fool's errand after him. I'd look elsewhere if I were you."

I seized her hands as a drowning man would a straw.

"Elsewhere?" I repeated. "What do you mean? Murray, Murray, you know, you guess where she is. Oh, don't keep me in suspense! If you knew what horrible thoughts torture me!"

"I know no more than you, sir, where she is," she interrupted sadly. "By elsewhere I think I meant somewhere near the sea. For the last week she's been talking about the sea, and seagulls, and rocks and things o' the kind, and complaining of a pain in her head and a mistiness over her eyes."

"Of course, of course," I broke in eagerly. "What a short-sighted, dull fool I've been! She's gone to Donegal! I'll start after her at once and bring her home before the tales get about, Murray, I rely on you——"

"You may, sir; I'll do my best, never fear," she said impressively, laying her hand on my arm to detain me. "But—but, Master Paul, forgive me saying what I'm going to say. Having known you from your cradle, and, as it were, playing the part of mother to you when your own was taken so young——"

"Fire ahead!" I burst in impatiently. "You know you can say what you like to me, Murray."

"Then, Master Paul," she whispered hurriedly, "take my advice, and, before you bring your wife home, send the other away."

"Murray!" I stammered, releasing myself. "What nonsense you talk! It's—it's you who are on the wrong track now. Ed—Miss Stopford's presence here has had nothing to do with the unfortunate misunderstanding with my poor wife—how could it?"

The old woman laughed bitterly, and moved away, shaking her head. I pursued her uneasily.

"Listen to me, and I'll convince you. Helen never knew, never even suspected that I—I had once cared for Miss Stopford. She believed I looked upon her as a sister whom I was brought up with; she never objected to her staying here, indeed she went at once to the General the moment the visit was suggested; never showed the faintest sign of—of dislike or jealousy. Oh, do stop nodding that ridiculous gray old head of yours!" I burst out impatiently. "Say what you mean and have done with it."

"Blind, blind, blind!" she repeated, looking at me with pitying reproach. "Your wife knew you loved Miss Edith the first day you met her here, and, though she has been fighting against the knowledge—trying to deceive herself—it has been of no use; day after day the truth has been burning into her poor heart, turning her very brain—until she could bear it no longer, and now she has fled from her pain."

"If this be true," I muttered hoarsely, "as sure as there is a Heaven above I had not the faintest—at least not a reasonable or tangible—suspicion of such a thing being the case. How—how should I? She—she never complained—never reproached me—"

"But she loved you, Master Paul—loved you as few men are loved by women—even by the truest or best of them. You had no reasonable suspicion of that, had you? Ah, no, no! And, loving you as she did, how could you ever expect her not to see what every visitor who came to the house, every servant about the place, saw and commented on?"

"What did they see—confound them?" I blustered wrathfully.

"Saw that you were keeping a sweetheart and a wife under one roof," the old servant retorted bluntly; "saw your face brighten when you looked at the one, heard your voice soften when you spoke to her; saw you passing notes to one another, riding together, slipping away together ten times a day; meeting after dark, whispering together. Ah, Master Paul, Master Paul, does not your conscience this moment tell you what they saw and what brings the color into your face so cruel hot this minute? There—I've spoken out as you bade me, and I've said too much I dare say; but I couldn't help it. Send me about my business, if you like. I couldn't help it; it was wrong—wrong!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Without vouchsafing a reply, I seized my portmanteau, and flung it into the dog-cart waiting to take me to the station.

The next evening, worn out with suspense and anxiety, I sighted the old farm-house on the hill.

Mrs. Casey was ill in bed, Mike informed me, and could not see any one, no matter how urgent or important their business. She knew nothing whatever of my wife, or heard from her since she took my name, or heard from her within the last three months. She begged me to go away and let her leave this world in peace. She wished to be troubled no more with the affairs of this world, and, if I insisted on forcing myself into her presence, would refuse to give me speech.

I walked slowly away and stood on the edge of the cliff staring out to sea, wondering whither to turn, what to do next, when old Molly touched my elbow, and, turning to her, hope and relief lightened me in a flash.

"Molly, you bring me news. She is with you," I began eagerly, and then stopped short as she mournfully shook her head.

"No," she said, taking the pipe from her mouth, "I bring ye no news. I only heard half an hour ago what had happened. And the 'ould wan wouldn't see ye, wouldn't she? I was after thinkin' she wouldn't."

"You know nothing; you cannot help me?" I repeated blankly. "Oh, don't say that!"

"Nothing, my lad—nothing. She hasn't been here, an' I don't think she'll come now, poor little thing; ye began to ill-use her soon enough, Heaven knows! Well, well, I'm not surprised. I thought it would all end that way; but not so soon—oh, not so cruel soon!" she repeated, with a harsh laugh. "Ye might have spared her for waa year at the laist, for she loved ye true."

"Molly," I cried vehemently, "you—you don't understand. Listen to me! I—I tell you I would give every farthing I possess, my life itself, to find her now safe and well and—and teach her to forgive me! Do not judge me so harshly; but help me, help me, for there's not a moment to be lost!"

"I'll help ye as well as I can," she said, after a searching glance, "for I see ye're sorry, but I'm feard my help won't go far. Sit down beside me, an' I'll tell ye her mother's story to begin with, if ye haven't heerd it already belike."

"Her mother died when she was an infant, she told me."

"Ay. When she was four days old her mother stole out o' the bed one wild night in November, an' flung herself from the stone on which yer sittin' down to the beach below. She was picked up in the bay next mornin' by the boys comin' home from the fishin', every bone in her body broke to bits—as cruel a sight as iver me ould eyes fell on. I couldn't get it out o' me sight for months after."

(To be Continued.)

Juvenile Jokes.

"Well, Johnnie," said the minister to a little fellow, aged 6, "I hear you are going to school now." "Yes, sir, was the reply. "And what part of it do you like best?" asked the good man. "Comin' home," was the prompt and truthful answer.

Harry, aged 5, had his photograph taken recently, and when the proof was sent home his mamma said he looked too solemn and asked him why he didn't smile. "I did smile, mamma," replied the little fellow, but I guess the man forgot to put it down."

"Mamma," asked little Willie, "did Daniel Webster build the dictionary?" No, dear; it was Noah; but why do you ask?" said his mother. "Why," replied the youngster, "our teacher said that Noah built the ark, and I thought he might have got Daniel to build the dictionary for him if he was busy."

Tommy, aged 5, and his cousin Willie, aged 6, had several little altercations, in which Tommy invariably got the worst of it. One day his mamma said to him: "Tommy, to-morrow is Willie's birthday; wouldn't you like to give him something?" "You just better believe I would," was the reply; "but, you see, he's bigger than I am and I can't."

Little 5-year-old Clara's papa had been away on a protracted business trip and her mamma was putting things in order and making sundry preparations for his return. Clara watched her closely for awhile and then observed: "Mamma, you make as much fuss as old Mr. Prodigal." "What do you mean, dear?" asked her mother. "I never heard of Mr. Prodigal." "Oh, yes, you did, mamma," was the reply. "Don't you know, the bible tells about what a fuss he made when his son came back?"

PLAYING SANTA CLAUS

OTHER, will Santa Claus bring me a sleigh tomorrow? I would rather have a sleigh than anything else in the world.

"When I passed Mr. Dunkirk's store last night it was full of sleighs," said Archie presently, "but they were all marked one dollar and a half, and I have only twenty five cent pieces in my bank."

"Bring me the bank," said his mother, opening her pocketbook.

In another moment Archie stood before his mother rattling the coins in the small tin box.

"If I give you ten more five-cent pieces," said his mother, smiling, "how much will you have then?"

"One hundred and fifty cents," cried Archie, laughing aloud. "May I go and buy the sleigh now?"

"Yes," said his mother, "but I want some of those lovely red berries I saw in the wood yesterday. They would look so nice among the evergreens. And besides, grandma and your aunts love them so."

"I'll bring you a lot," said Archie.

In a few moments he was running down the road toward Mr. Dunkirk's store.

As he passed a tiny cottage on the way a very small boy pushed open the window and shouted:

"Santa Claus is going to bring me a sleigh tonight."

"How do you know, Dick?" asked Archie.

"Ellen told me so," said Dick.

Archie had never seen the little fellow's face look so bright and happy. He knew that Dick lived alone with his sister, who, though only 15 years old, worked hard all day long in the big silk factory to support herself and her brother. And as Archie walked toward Mr. Dunkirk's store he thought a great deal of Dick's happy face.

Archie took a long time choosing his sleigh, so when his selection was made and he started off penniless but happy, dragging a wonderful red and green sleigh after him, it was almost dark.

As he turned a corner suddenly he ran against a girl standing in the road. It was Dick's sister, and she was crying.

"What is the matter?" asked Archie. "Why don't you go home?"

"I—I can't bear to see Dick. I promised him a sleigh and I spoiled a lot of silk today and have been dismissed from the works without my week's pay."

She gave one look at Archie's new sleigh and hid her face on the fence rail.

The tears were in Archie's eyes as he went on his way. When he reached the little cottage he stood still behind a great bush outside of the gate. Little Dick was still peeping out. Archie watched the eager face for several moments, then, when the child left the window, he stole sofely through the little garden and up the rickety steps. Then, fastening the rope of his beautiful new sleigh to the door knob, he gave three loud raps and ran away.

He heard Dick open the door and shout:

"Oh! oh! oh! See what Santa Claus has brought me!"

Suddenly Archie remembered the berries he had promised to bring his mother.

"It is not dark yet," he said, "and I know just where to find them." He climbed the fence at the side of the road and went toward a thick clump of trees.

* * * *

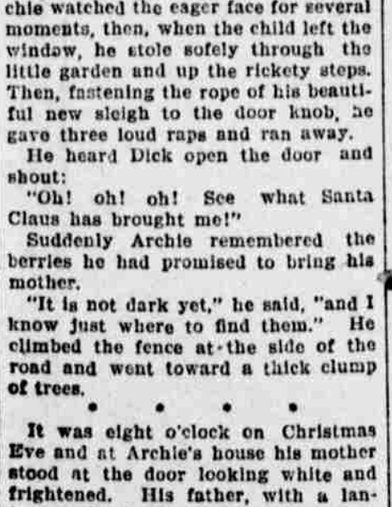
It was eight o'clock on Christmas Eve and at Archie's house his mother stood at the door looking white and frightened. His father, with a lantern in his hand, stood in the road. Archie had not come home.

"I have been to Mr. Dunkirk's store," said Archie's father. "He left before dark. Now I will search the wood."

Some one shouted, "Hello! hello! hello!"

"There he is now!" cried Archie's mother. "I am so glad!" and she ran down the road toward the voice.

The first person they met was Ellen, pulling a beautiful new red and green sleigh over the smooth snow, and on



MADE TWO HAPPY.

it was little Dick, and Archie with his arms full of red berries.

"Oh, where have you been?" said his mother, as he ran to meet her.

"I went to the woods for some berries and my coat caught in a branch and I could not get it away. If it had not been for Ellen I might have been hanging there yet."

"How can I ever thank you?" said Archie's mother, turning to Ellen.

"I saw him go into the wood," replied Ellen, "after he put this beautiful sleigh on our doorstep for Dick. Then, when I heard he was [illegible] lowed and looked for him [illegible] have searched all night. I [illegible] do enough for him. He is [illegible] est, best little fellow in [illegible] and, turning, she hurried [illegible]

The next morning when Archie rushed into the room where the Christmas tree stood loaded down with gifts, he found beneath it an express wagon, and on the wagon was a beautiful red and green sleigh, exactly like the one he had given to Dick.

Well, Archie was very happy that day, but he often thought of Ellen and poor little Dick, and when the odor of roasted turkey and mince pies crept through the house he wondered if they would have any Christmas dinner.

He asked his mother about it as she was brushing his hair. She only kissed him for reply, but in the dining-room, where all the family from far and near were assembled around the table heaped with all manner of good things, she said:

Archie, come here and welcome your guests," and he found himself seated between a pretty young girl dressed in white and a very small boy in a new suit of clothes. It was Ellen and her brother Dick.

Christmas—The Little Children.

We love little children. They are the future. No period of life is more full of interest than that of childhood. We watch the expanding mind of a fine boy as we do the unfolding of a flower. Childhood is the primrose season of life; and when we see a cluster of little innocent urchins around the hearth, if our wishes could be realized all their after days should be those of sunshine and happiness. We like children and sympathize in all their little griefs and share in all their hilarious and boisterous merriment. In this season of festivity they should never be forgotten. Send them early to bed on Christmas eve, on good terms with themselves and all the rest of the world, and then fill their suspended stockings for the bounties of St. Nicholas with trinkets and toys, and give them good and useful articles of the season. Oh, the pleasures of these offices! None but a parent ever did or ever can conceive them. Look at their bright and shining faces in the morning and read your reward in their astonishment and gratitude. Parents, neglect not your little folks at this season of the year. You purchase a large amount of happiness at a trifling cost. Never be unmindful of your duty in this respect. Please your children on proper occasions and they will please you in after life.

Presents Come High.

"Winnie got a diamond ring for her Christmas."

"How did she get it?"

"Hung up her stockings."

"Jack, of course? But how did Jack get it?"

"Hung up his watch."

CHRISTMAS CAROL.

Hark! those strains, so sweetly falling,
On that festal morn!
To our hearts are they recalling,
Christ, our King, was born.
He has come to give a blessing
To the poor, the sad;
He has come with kind caressing,
Making children glad.

Chorus:

Hark! those strains so sweetly falling,
On that festal morn;
To our heart they are recalling,
Christ, our King, was born.

Hie we to the lowly manger,
At the village inn;
Let us greet the wondrous stranger
Saving all from sin;
Let us bring a royal treasure,
Like the wise of old;
Love sincere and without measure,
Better far than gold.

Chorus.—Hark, etc.

What though wintry winds are blowing
Leaves from off the tree;
And no more the flocks are lowing,
On the upland lea;
Christ each little lamb is tending,
Folding it with care;
From the storms of life defending,
From its chilling air.

Chorus.—Hark, etc.

May those angels, at the dawning,
Singing in the sky,
Ever with a kindly warning
Bid the tempter fly.
When no more on earth is given
Joy like this today,
May such messengers of heaven
Bear our souls away.

Chorus.—Hark, etc.

A Phenomenon.

When Christmas comes with merry pace
The small boy is a peach;
His stomach is the resting place
Of everything in reach

SOME Varses

I HEAR the winds that sweep the moor, I know the waves are high,
And far above the stormy coast doth bend an inky sky;
I'm waiting still to greet my boy who promised he would come

I've longed and waited many years,
I've watched the speechless sea,
But somewhere in the distance sails the Seagull far from me;
Each Christmastide I set his chair before the chestnut fire,
And wait for footsteps at the door to bring me my desire.

The rose has faded on the mead, and winter crowns the wold,
And in the village Christmas bells ring out the story old,
But dear to all the world, how in the soft and scented hay,
In Judah's land beloved by all, the gentle Christ-child lay.

I stir the fire and wait for Joe, for something unexpressed
Tells me that I shall feel again the hand so often blessed,
That from the tropics far away, or from the lands of snow
The missing ship will bring the boy who left me long ago.

The gulls are screaming where the waves in fury lash the shore,
And Christmas finds me all alone with sorrow at my door,
Yet in my heart there blooms a flow'r both delicate and fair—
The rope of Hope which angel hands have sweetly planted there.

Was that the storm king at my door?
Or did I hear a hand?
Who comes to wish me well today o'er snowy sea and land?
This Christmas I would wait alone within my little home
For Joe, who told me with a kiss that some day he would come.

It was a knock, I ope the door. What stranger guest is this?
Unlike the tall and gallant youth whose cherished voice I miss.
What! back at last? it cannot be, yet 'tis his smile, I know,
And Christmas brings my darling home despite the swirling snow.

Aye, thro' the tempest and the sea he comes to keep his word,
And now I know that far above the widow's prayer was heard;
There steals into my little room a light like that which fell
Upon the plains of Bethlehem when watched the shepherds well.

I place him at the table and I look into his face,
The while the village bells ring out their hymns of peace and grace;
And Joe gives back the same old smile so full of love and joy,
The smile that made me happy when he was a little boy.

I read of Christmastides within the palaces of old,
Where kings and princes merry make beneath a cloth of gold;
But I would rather sit today within our little home,
And bless the God who brought me Joe across the crested foam.

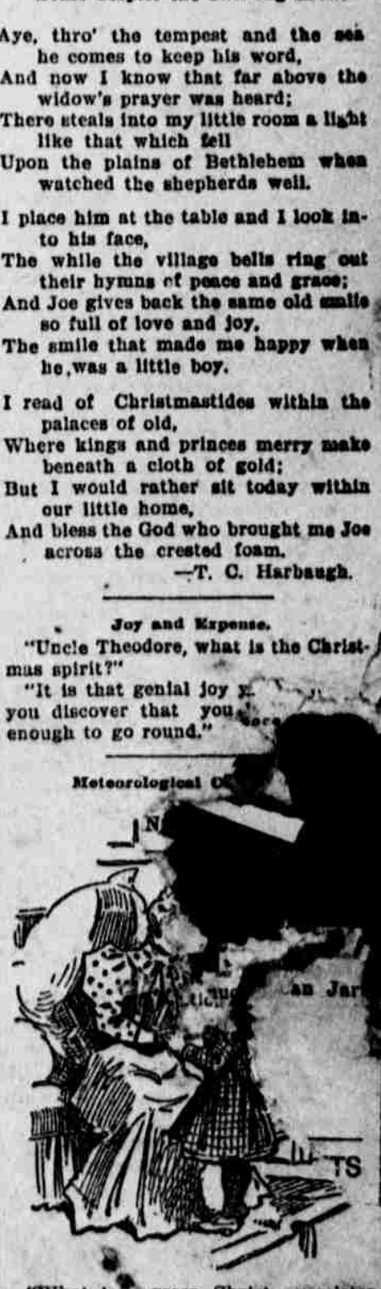
—T. C. Harbaugh.

Joy and Expense.

"Uncle Theodore, what is the Christmas spirit?"

"It is that genial joy [illegible] you discover that you [illegible] enough to go round."

Meteorological C[illegible]



"What is [illegible] green Chri[illegible] Madge?"

"A green Christmas? [illegible] time when a girl gets [illegible] of holly [illegible]

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