



THE HOLY NIGHT

One star burned low within the darkened east,
And from a stable door an answering light
Crept faintly forth, where through full hours of night
A woman watched. The sounds of day had ceased,
And save the gentle tread of restless beast
There dwelt a hush profound. The mother's sight
So hidden by her Babe took no affright
When shadows of the beams, that caught the least
Of light, seemed shapened to a lengthening cross;
She only saw a crown made by a fleece
Of golden hair. Nought pleased pain or loss—
To her, the pivot of the swinging sphere
Lay sheltered in her arms so warm and near.
A mother's heart proclaimed Him "Prince of Peace!"

—Edna A. Foster.

The Tramp's Christmas

He was such an unkempt, sad looking creature when he presented himself at the back door that Christmas morning asking for something to eat that Mary was more than half inclined to disobey the rule of the Tracy household, which stood good at all seasons of the year as well as at Yuletide, and refuse his request. Before she could do so, however, Mrs. Tracy herself came into the kitchen, and, with scant show of hospitality, Mary allowed the tramp to enter.

She had always secretly grumbled because Mrs. Tracy would allow no one to be turned away hungry, and today there was no excuse, for the family had just finished breakfast and there was plenty of food left to give the man a substantial meal.

"Go in to come and rob the house to-night, like's not," was Mary's inward comment as she put the coffee pot on the stove, and she watched the man narrowly to see if he were making a mental plan of the house, but her suspected burglar did not once look up from the floor as he sat nervously twirling his hat.

"He's young and able to work," Mary soliloquized, as she bustled to and fro putting eatables on one end of the kitchen table. "Might be tolerable good lookin', too, if he was shaved and dressed up—and washed."

"There!" she snapped, setting a cup of coffee down on the table with as much force as she could without spilling its contents. "Your vittual's set."

The man, scarcely raising his eyes, dropped his hat and hitched his chair near the table.

Just as he eagerly clutched the cup of fragrant coffee, a door opened, a pair of merry blue eyes peered into the kitchen and a shrill little voice piped out, "Hello, man, merry Christmas!"

The "man" started, shifted uneasily in his chair, but made no reply. Undaunted by his chilling reception, the door was burst open, and a golden-haired little boy burst into the room. With the unquestioning confidence of childhood, he walked up to the stranger and said gravely, "I said merry Christmas."

"Run into the other room, Donald," Mary put in hastily.

The man shot a half-defiant glance at her, but did not look at the child.

"I don't want to," the little fellow replied. "He's company, and mamma said I could 'tain him. I brought the new Mother Doose book dat I dot from Santa Claus to show he, and, pushing a chair close to the table, from it he mounted the end of the table opposite the man, and sat there like a sweet, rosy cherub observing some dark spirit.

The tramp, who seemed almost famished, paused just long enough to

look wonderingly at his strange little companion, and then gave his full attention to the meal.

"Don't you want to talk?" Donald demanded.

"I'm not fit—that is, 'er, I don't know how to talk to such a little kid," the man answered.

"All right, I guess you want to eat," the child observed, graciously. "I guess I'll read to you," opening the book he was holding in his arms. "You know Mother Goose, don't you?"

The man shook his head, but something like a smile fitted across his sullen features.

"Well, I'll show you the pictures and read you 'bout 'em. This one," and Donald slid along the table as near to the man as the dishes would allow, "this one is about 'Blue Boy.' I'll read 'bout him," and, in a chanting, high-pitched voice, he repeated the rhyme of "Little Boy Blue."

"Did you ever sleep under a haystack?" he asked, suddenly, at the conclusion of his recitation.

The man frowned slightly at the childish query, bit his lip and nodded his head.

"Was it nice?" went on his interrogator. "Did your mamma let you?"

The man's lower lip was pressed cruelly by his teeth at this question, but a surlly shake of his head was his only reply.

"Oh, was you naughty and runned away?" the boy asked, slowly.

Had Mary been an observing girl, she would have seen, under the scrubby beard and grime on the haggard face, a dull red flush spread to the roots of his shaggy, neglected hair.

"Didn't your mamma come to look for you?" continued the little tormentor.

"She didn't know where I was," the tramp answered, in a strange, muffled voice.

"Then you hid from her?" exclaimed the child, with blue eyes wide open.

The man was looking out of the window now, forgetful of his good breakfast.

"I was naughty once and runned away," Donald prattled on, "and when my mamma found me she was just awful glad, but she cried, too—wasn't that funny? And she said mothers was always glad when they got their boys back, even when they was big and runned awful far off, 'strayed into the paths—I forget just what that part was, but she said I must always come back to her—an—an—I don't

"A DOOR OPENED."

"member any more, but I guess if you'd go back to your mamma she'd forget the naughty and be glad. Do you think she'd cry?"

The man cast one fierce look over his shabby person. "Cry!" he exclaimed, bitterly. "Oh— he threw his breath hard between his teeth as the sight of the baby face choked back the oath that nearly escaped him.

"Isn't you goin' to eat any more?" chirped the little fellow, with awakened hospitality, noticing that his guest, sitting with his head on his hand, seemed to have lost his appetite.

The child's voice roused him from his thoughts, and, seeing that Mary had paused in her work and was watching him curiously, he asked humbly, "Can I have some coffee?"

Meanwhile Donald was turning the pages of his book. "Here's a funny picture," he announced, pointing with his fat little finger, "but it's 'bout a dreadful naughty boy. I'll read 'bout

him," and, in a very solemn and impressive tone, he repeated the tale of "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son."

"It's dreadful bad to steal, you know," he commented, gravely. "My mamma says so, and, of course, she knows—mamma knows most everything, don't they? Once—what do you think?—I stole! I didn't steal a pig like Tom, but I stole some little cakes, and my mamma talked to me a long time, and she told me so many things so I'd grow to be a good man. Did your mamma want you to be a good man, too?"

The man choked on a hasty cup of coffee, but made no reply. Donald did not seem to expect one, but chatted on. "I was 'traid my mamma did not love me any more when I stole those cakes, 'cause she looked so sorry, but," with a happy little laugh, "seemed like she loved me more'n ever after. But I don't want to see her look sorry like that again. Did you ever make your mamma look sorry—out of her eyes, you know?"

A smothered groan from the stranger and, with a child's intuition of "something wrong," Donald sought to cheer and console, and said, reassuringly, "Well, you just go an' tell her you're sorry an' see if she don't be glad and love you. I most know she will."

The man had ceased eating and sat motionless with his head bowed on his breast until Mary approached and curiously asked if he were "done eatin'."

"Yes," he answered absently, and, looking wistfully at the child, he reached for his hat.

"Is you goin' to see your mamma?" questioned Donald, eagerly.

"Yes, my little man," came the answer, in a clear, ringing voice that made Mary jump and drop a basin.

"That's just where I am going. But first, tell me your name."

"I'm little Donald Robert Tracy, and my papa's big Donald Robert!"

"Good-by, little preacher. You're the best one I've ever heard," and just brushing the golden head with his lips, the tramp passed out of the door and went down the street, not with the slouching, hang-dog air with which he had approached the house, but with head erect and shoulders squared, he swung along with long, easy strides.

"Of all the ungrateful wretches!" exclaimed Mary, angrily, to Mrs. Tracy, who had slipped in through the half-open door. "He never even said 'thank you.' Her mistress did not seem to hear, but, with shining eyes, gathered her little son up in her arms, and, as she pressed him closely to her, she whispered brokenly, "And a little child shall lead them."

A year passed, and little Donald's "taining" the tramp, was forgotten

by all save Mrs. Tracy. She often wondered what fruit the good seed sown by the innocent child last Christmas morning had borne. That he had been God's chosen instrument for working out some great end, her gentle heart never doubted.

It was, therefore, a great pleasure and satisfaction to her to receive a long letter from the "man." It was written from his home in a far eastern city, and told, in a simple, straightforward manner, the story of his downfall and how, moved by Donald's childish prattle, he had worked his way back home, resolved to begin life anew; how kind friends had helped him and encouraged him, and how he was doing well at his old trade of bookbinding.

"I was going from bad to worse," the letter ran, "and nothing is easier for a young fellow to do, and the road down to being a 'common tramp' is a short one when one gets started. When I came to your house that Christmas morning I was bitter, hard and desperate. No one living could have touched my heart as did that little blue-eyed boy. His little sermon, with its text taken from 'Mother Goose,' snatched this poor brand from the burning. Tell the little chap that I found my mamma, and she was glad as he said."

Accompanying the letter was a package of Christmas gifts, addressed to Donald. Among other things it contained a book—a copy of "Mother Goose" exactly like the one from which he had "read" to the man to "tain him," exquisitely bound in white vellum. On the cover in gold letters was Donald's name, and below it, "From his grateful Blue Boy, Christmas—189—"

In England children hang their stockings at the foot of their beds. In America the whole family suspend their stockings from the mantelpiece of the sitting room, to save Santa Claus the trouble of ascending the stairs and entering each room to distribute his wares.

The Diamond Bracelet

By MRS. HENRY WOOD,
Author of East Lynne, Etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

In an obscure room of a low and dilapidated lodging house, in a low and dilapidated neighborhood, there sat a man one evening in the coming twilight; a towering, gaunt skeleton, whose remarkably long arms and legs looked little more than skin and bone. The arms were fully exposed to view, since their owner, though he possessed and wore a waistcoat, dispensed with the use of a shirt. An article, once a coat, lay on the floor, to be donned at will—if it could be got into for the holes. The man sat on the floor in a corner, his head finding a resting place against the wall, and he had dropped into a light sleep, but if ever famine was depicted in a face, it was in his. Unwashed, unshaven, with matted hair and feverish lips; the cheeks were hollow, the nostrils white and pinched, and the skin around the mouth had a blue tinge. Some one tried and shook the door; it aroused him, and he started up, but only to cower in a bending attitude and listen.

"I hear you," cried a voice. "How are you tonight, Joe? Open the door."

The voice was not one he knew; not one that might be responded to.

"Do you call this politeness, Joe Nicholls? If you don't open the door, I shall take the liberty of opening it for myself, which will put you to the trouble of mending the fastenings afterwards."

"Who are you?" cried Nicholls, reading determination in the voice. "I'm gone to bed, and can't admit folks tonight."

"Gone to bed at 8 o'clock?"

"Yes; I'm ill."

"I will give you one minute, and then I come in. You will open it if you want to save trouble."

Nicholls yielded to his fate and opened the door.

The gentleman—he looked like one—cast his keen eyes around the room. There was not a vestige of furniture in it; nothing but the bare, dirty walls, from which the mortar crumbled, and the bare, dirty boards.

"What did you mean by saying you were gone to bed, eh?"

"So I was. I was asleep there," pointing to the corner, "and there's my bed. What do you want?" added Nicholls, peering at the stranger's face in the gloom of the evening, but seeing it imperfectly, for his hat was drawn low over it.

"A little talk with you. The last sweepstake you got into—"

The man lifted his face and burst forth with such eagerness that the stranger could only arrest his own words and listen.

"It was a swindle from beginning to end. I had scraped together the ten shillings to put in it, and I drew the right horse and was shuffled out of the gains and I have never had my dues, not a farthing of 'em. Since then I have been ill, and I can't get about to better myself. Are you come, sir, to make it right?"

"Some—the stranger coughed—"friends of mine were in it, also," said he; "and they lost their money."

"Everybody lost it; the gettters-up bolted with all they had drawn into their fingers. Have they been took, do you know?"

"All in good time; they have left their trail. So you have been ill, have you?"

"Ill! Just take a sight of me! There's an arm for a big man."

He stretched out his naked arm for inspection; it appeared as if a touch would snap it. The stranger laid his hand upon its fingers, and his other hand appeared to be stealing furtively toward his own pocket.

"I should say this looks like starvation, Joe."

"Some'at nigh akin to it."

A pause of unsuspicion and the handcuffs were clapped on the astonished man. He started up with an oath.

"No need to make a noise, Nicholls," said the detective with a careless air. "I have got two men waiting outside."

"I swear I wasn't in the plate robbery," passionately uttered the man. "I knew it, but I didn't join 'em, and I never had the worth of a salt spoon after it was melted down. And they call me a coward, and they leave me here to starve and die! I swear I wasn't in it."

"Well, we'll talk about the plate robbery another time," said the officer, as he raised his hat; "you have got those bracelets on, my man, for another sort of bracelet. A diamond one. Don't you remember me?"

The prisoner's mouth fell.

"I thought that was over and done with all this time—I don't know what you mean," he added, correcting himself.

"No," said the officer, "it's just beginning. The bracelet is found and has been traced to you. You were a clever fellow, and I had my doubts of you at the time; I thought you were too clever to go on long."

"I should be ashamed to play the sneak and catch a fellow in this way. Why couldn't you come openly in your proper clothes? not come playing the spy in the garb of a friendly civilian."

"My men are in their 'proper clothes,'" returned the equable officer, "and you will have the honor of their escort presently. I came because they did not know you, and I did."

"Three officers to a single man, and he a skeleton!" uttered Nicholls, with a vast show of indignation.

"Ay! but you were powerful once and ferocious, too. The skeleton aspect is a recent one."

"And all for nothing. I don't know about any bracelets."

"Don't trouble yourself with inventions, Nicholls. Your friend is safe in our hands, and has made a full confession."

"What friend?" asked Nicholls, too eagerly.

"The lady you got to dispose of it for you to the Jew."

Nicholls was startled to incaution. "She hasn't split, has she?"

"Every particular she knew or guessed at. Split to save herself."

"Then there's no faith in woman."

"There never was yet," returned the officer. "If they are not at the top and bottom of every mischief, Joe, they are sure to be in the middle. Is this your coat?" touching it gingerly.

"She's a disgrace to the female sex, she is," raved Nicholls, disregarding the question as to the coat. "But it's a relief now I'm took, it's a weight off my mind; I was always expecting of it, and I shall get food in the Old Bailey at any rate."

"Ah," said the officer, "you were in good service as a respectable servant; you had better have stuck to your duties."

"The temptation was so great," observed the man, who had evidently abandoned all idea of denial; and now that he had done so, was ready to be voluble with remembrance and particulars.

"Don't say anything to me," said the officer. "It will be used against you."

"It came along of my long legs," cried Nicholls, ignoring the friendly injunction, and proceeding to enlarge on the feat he had performed. "I have never had a happy hour since; I was second footman there, and a good place I had; and I had wished, thousands of times, that the bracelet had been in a sea of molten fire. Our folks had taken a house in the neighborhood of Ascot for the race week, and they had left me at home to take care of the kitchen maid, and another inferior or two, taking the rest of the servants with them. I had to clean the windows afore they returned, and I had druv it off till the Thursday evening, and out I got on the balcony, to begin with the back drawing room."

"What did you say you got out on?"

"The balcony. The thing with the green rails around it, what encloses the windows. While I was leaning over the rails afore I begun, I heard something like click-click going on in the fellow room at the next door, which was Colonel Hope's. It was like as if something light was being laid on the table, and presently I heard two voices beginning to talk, a lady's and a gentleman's, and I listened—"

"No good ever comes of listening, Joe!" interrupted the officer.

"I didn't listen for the sake of listening, but it was awful hot, a standing outside there in the sun, and listening was better than working. I didn't want to hear neither, for I was thinking of my own concerns, and what a fool I was to have idled away my time all day till the sun came on to the back winders. Bit by bit I heard what they were talking about—that it was jewels they had got there, and that one was worth 200 guineas. Thinks I, if that was mine, I'd do no more work. After awhile I heard them go out of the room, and I thought I'd have a look at the rich things, and I stepped over slanting ways on to the little ledge running along the houses, holding on by our balcony, and then I passed my hands along the wall till I got hold of the balcony—but one with ordinary legs and arms couldn't have done it. You couldn't, sir!"

"Perhaps not," remarked the officer. "There wasn't fur to fall if I had fell, only on to the kitchen leads under; but I didn't fall, and I raised myself on to their balcony, and looked in. My! what a show it was! stunning jewels, all laid out there; so close that if I had put my hand inside it must have struck all among 'em; and the fiend prompted me to take one. I didn't stop to look; I didn't stop to think; the one that twinkled the brightest, and had the most stones in it was the nearest to me, and I clutched it and slipped it into my footman's undress jacket, and stepped back again."

"And got safe into your own balcony."

"Yes; but I didn't clean the winder that night. I was upset like by what I had done, and I think, if I could have put it back again, I should; but there was no opportunity. I wrapped it up in my winder leather, and then in a sheet of paper, and then I put it up the chimney in one of the spare bedrooms. I was up the next morning afore 5, and I cleaned my winders; I'd no trouble to awake myself, for I had never slept. The same day towards evening you called sir, and asked me some questions—whether we had seen any one on the leads at the back, and such like. I said, as master was just come home from Ascot, would you be pleased to speak to him."

"Ah," again remarked the officer, "you were a clever fellow that day. But if my suspicions had not been strongly directed to another quarter, I might have looked you up more sharply."

"I kept it by me for a month or two, and then I gave warning to leave. I thought I'd have my fling, and I became acquainted with her—that lady—"

and somehow she wormed out of me that I had got it, and let her dispose of it for me, for she said she knew how to do it without danger."

"What did you get for it?"

The skeleton shook his head. Thirty-four pound, and I had counted on a hundred and fifty. She took an oath she had not helped herself to a sixpence."

"Oaths are plentiful with the genus," remarked the detective.

"She stood to it she hadn't, and she stopped and helped me to spend it. After that was done, she went over to somebody else who was in luck; and I have tried to go on, and I can't; honestly or dishonestly; it seems all one; nothing prospers, and I'm naked and famishing—and I wish I was dying."

"Evil courses never do prosper, Nicholls," said the officer, as he called in the policemen, and consigned the prisoner to their care.

So Gerard was innocent!

"But how was it you skillful detectives could not be on this man's scent?" asked Colonel Hope of the officer, when he heard the tale.

"Colonel, I was thrown off. Your positive belief in your nephew's guilt infected me, and appearances were very strong against him. Miss Seaton also helped to throw me off; she said, if you remember, that she did not leave the room; but it now appears she did leave it when your nephew did, though only for a few moments. Those few moments sufficed to do the job."

"It's strange she could not tell the exact truth," growled the colonel.

"She probably thought she was exact enough since she only remained outside the door and could answer for it that no one had entered by it. She forgot the window. I thought of the window the instant the loss was mentioned to me, but Miss Seaton's assertion that she never had the window out of her view prevented my dwelling on it. I did go to the next door, and saw the very fellow who committed the robbery, but his manner was sufficiently satisfactory. He talked too freely; I did not like that; but I found he had been in the same service 15 months, and, as I must repeat, I laid the guilt to another."

"It is a confoundedly unpleasant affair for me," cried the colonel; "I have published my nephew's disgrace and guilt all over London."

"It is more unpleasant for him, colonel," was the rejoinder of the officer.

"And I have kept him short of money, and suffered him to be sued for debt, and I have let him go and live amongst the runaway scamps over the water, and not hindered his engaging himself as a merchant's clerk; and, in short, I have played the very deuce with him."

"But reparation is, doubtless, in your heart and hands, colonel."

"I don't know that, sir," testily concluded the colonel.

(To be continued.)

Floating Button Factory.

Taking the factory to the raw material instead of bringing the material to the factory, is an innovation just put in operation on the Mississippi river by a button factory, and it is a plan that has many practical advantages.

This factory is about forty-two feet long and twelve feet wide, fitted with all the necessary machinery for the manufacture of buttons, and provided with a three-horse-power engine for its work.

The principal material used by this factory is mussel shells, which are found at nearly all points along the river, and one of the great expenses in conducting the business heretofore has been the cost of transporting the shells. Now the factory has reversed the operation and will go to the mussels.

When a bed of shells is found the boat will drop its anchor and go to work. When the bed is exhausted it will move on to a new location. In this fashion it will go from state to state, from Minnesota to Louisiana, passing along with the seasons, and always enjoying the most desirable weather of the Mississippi valley.

Automobile Poachers.

A Paris correspondent tells of some wholesale poaching of automobilists, who used their "car" as a trap for the game and made off with enormous "bags" of plunder while the gamekeeper slept. The trick was so clever that, barring the feelings of the birds who failed of being "preserved" for the guns of sporting owners, the automobile poachers must be congratulated on accomplishing their purpose. They pretended to have broken down while driving along the high road, and told the peasants and the gamekeeper, with many lamentations, they would be forced to remain all night in the field adjacent. The gamekeeper, though he says it was against his will, aided the men in moving the car to a place of safety until certain repairs could be effected. These "repairs" were made in the dead of night by robbing the preserves of nearly every partridge and quail they contained and making off with the booty.

Nearness of Relationship.

A little miss of five, living in Washington, conspired with her brother, age four, to save enough pennies to buy papa and mamma presents. A friend of the family noticed that mamma's present was much finer and more expensive than papa's and was impelled by curiosity to inquire why the bulk of the savings had been expended for the mother. The little miss replied: "Well, you see, papa is only related to we children by marriage, while mamma is our relative by bormation."



"YOU KNOW MOTHER GOOSE DON'T YOU?"



"A DOOR OPENED."

