

Uncle Zeke's Conscience.

Some years ago there moved to the neighborhood of Uncle Zeke's a gentleman from New York, whose identity may be disguised under the name of Smith. The new-comer engaged vigorously in farming, and by liberal employment and prompt payment soon gained the good will of all the colored men around him. Uncle Zeke in particular was never weary of obtaining his praises, and many a bushel of oysters did Ezekiel convert into money at Bellevue, as Smith's estate was called. But all the good will of his humble neighbors did not suffice to protect Mr. Smith from pilfering. Sneaks would disappear mysteriously during the night, geese and turkeys would take wing for parts unknown, and in particular the corn-crib would frequently show by unmistakable signs that its sanctity had been violated. To the story of these various losses would Uncle Zeke incline a sympathetic ear, and his "Well, now, who ever hear do like o' dat? clah to goodness dese yere boys is gittin' wusser, an' wusser," evidenced alike his detestation of the crime and his contempt for the offender.

Smith's patience was at last exhausted, and he determined upon vigorous measures for the protection of his property. His first experiment was to place a large spring rat-trap, artistically concealed in a heap of oyster shells, close by the cat hole in the corn-crib door, expecting that the unwary thief, plunging his hand recklessly through the hole into the heap, would be caught and held till some one came to set him free. But lo! next morning the trap was found sprung and the heap of corn diminished, but the thief had vanished and left no trace behind.

At last a good-sized box arrived from New York, and the next day the local carpenter was ordered to fix two brass handles to the corn-crib; one to be put along side the door for convenience, as Mr. Smith publicly explained, of steadying one's self while turning the other. The second handle had a latch attached to it by which the door was secured on the inside, and was set in such a position that any one turning it must hold on by the other knob to prevent being thrown backward by the opening door. Both handles were profusely decorated with glass, and elicited much admiration from the hands, who submitted them to a critical examination. The carpenter's work being finished, Smith, in presence of all his employees, solemnly repeated, in front of the corn-crib, the first two lines of the second book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and announced that his corn was thenceforward secure. A box, stated to contain seeds, was that afternoon deposited in the crib, and during the early part of the ensuing night the proprietor of Bellevue secretly busied himself with a coil of insulated wire.

Numerous and diverse were the speculations among the darkies. Jim Oakley "lowed" Mr. Smith done "witched dat ar corn-house, sho' nuff." Tell you gemmen, you touch dem 'ore handles, evil spirit carry you 'way. No such ting's evil spirit it? How you know dere no such ting? Hush, boy; go see what de Bible say 'bout dem ting.' Pete Lee "didn't" believe in no sperite; got a gun fix somehwah inside dat house; turn de handle an' de gun go off. Seen dem ting's afore you country, when I live in Goozleum." Another theorist averred that "while Mr. Smith sayin' dat ar Scripser ober dem handles, he seen a white pigeon come a-sailin' 'roun' an' 'roun' an' 'roun', and done light on de peak o' de corn-house roof. High! tell you, Sar, sumpin up, sho'."

Uncle Zeke, like the rest, was troubled in his mind, but, unlike his fellows, he determined to waste no time in speculation, but to seek his information direct from head-quarters. Prepared with half a bushel of oysters, as an excuse for conversation, he sought an interview with Mr. Smith, and boldly propounded his questions.

"Mis' Smith, what you been a-doin' to dat ar crib o' yourn?"

"Why, Uncle Zeke, what do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nuffin, Sar; sorter curns like. Hearn all de boys talkin' 'bout it—nehor see nuffin like dat afore."

"Well, Uncle Zeke, I can't very well explain it to you; but I just advise you—d. n't go near dat crib after dark, or you may see something you won't like." And Uncle Zeke departed, revolving many things in his mind.

It was midnight—the hour when church yards are said to yawn, not with exhaustion, but returning animation. In front of the enchanted corn-house stood Brother Ezekiel, a lengthy pole in his hand, and a capacious meal bag over his shoulder. In silent meditation he stood for some five minutes, deliberating on the best plan of attack. The great Newfoundland watch-dog bounded toward him, evidently in rejoicing welcome. Forth from his pocket the old man drew a savory bit of fried bacon, which the faithless Bo'en eagerly devoured. The reflection ended, the dog lay contentedly on the ground, and watched the subsequent proceedings with the air of a totally disinterested observer.

"Clah to goodness, now," muttered Uncle Zeke, "wiah't I nuffin 'bout dis ting. Can't be no spring trap free do do? Kei kol Done bodder Mis' Smith sho' nuff when he find dat ole rat-trap sprung and nuffin coteh. High! Can' fool disser chile wid no traps. No, Sar! done see too much for dat."

Uncle Zeke passed, scratched his head meditatively, and then resumed his soliloquy:

"Well, I declar, ef disser don' beat preachin'! Mis' de a gun in duff. Ef ain' no gun, den dere ain't nuffin dere—all fool'sness. Anyway, I's gwine for try him."

Uncle Zeke threw his bag to the ground, stepped to one side of the house, and with his pole struck a sharp blow on the brass knob nearest him. Nothing followed. He tried against it with his stick, but still without effect. He went to the other side of the house and repeated his experiments on the second knob, but still all remained quiet.

Uncle Zeke now drew from his pocket a

skeleton key, mounted the ladder, and in a trice had opened the padlock which held the door.

"Dar now, jre's I tought. De boss done humbug dem fool nigger, make nuffin tiak disser house 'witched. Ain' nuffin dar, sho' nuff."

The old darkey reached up and cautiously turned the handle. The door opened a little, and, casting away all fear, Uncle Zeke boldly reached for the other knob, to steady himself while he swung back the door.

Literally like a flash of lightning the electric discharge passed through him. The muscles of his fingers contracted, and he could not release his hold of the enchanted handles. At last his feet slipped from the ladder, and the weight of his body tore his hands adrift. Like a log the old man dropped to the ground, and lay groaning, praying, and generally bewildered.

"Oh, do lawd's sake! Oh, my heavenly Marster! Who ober tought o' dat! My conscience done wake up! My conscience done wake up! Hearn 'bout it often, an' now I know it. Oh, my heavenly Marster! ef you lets up on me dis time, Uncle Zeke neber touch nuffin no mo'. Clah to goodness I's a change man from dis day. B-r-r-r-r-r—" And what with the shock, the fright, and the fall, Uncle Zeke's senses seemed leaving him.

"Ezekiel!" said a solemn voice. Instinctively Uncle Zeke answered, "Hear me," and looked in the direction of the sound. Oh, horror! A figure clad in white was nearing him with slow and solemn steps. As the mysterious visitor approached, it seemed to rise until it towered to the height of at least ten feet. The wretched Ezekiel, on his hands and knees, his eyes protruding, and his jaw dropped, remained as if paralyzed.

Suddenly the phantom bowed itself, and its head descending with incredible swiftness, smote the unfortunate Uncle Zeke senseless to the earth.

Three days later, as poor Uncle Zeke lay, racked with rheumatism and tormented with spiritual fear, upon his bed in the single room at Mr. Smith's of Bellevue, and in walked Mr. Smith of Bellevue.

"Good-morning, Uncle Zeke. Why, what's the matter with you, old man?"

"Oh, Mis' Smith! oh, Mis' Smith, I done had some terrible sperences lately. De angel ob de Lord done wrestle wid me, an' my conscience done woke, an' oh, my heavenly Marster, I's one sufferin' sinner. Mis' Smith, is you bin—is you done—is you m-miss any ting wid dat ar corn-house o' yourn?"

"No, indeed, Uncle Zeke; nobody been near it. Every thing all right now."

"An' nobody done touch de look? De look 'bery mornin'?"

"Yes, indeed. Why, who do you think would touch it, old man?"

Uncle Zeke answered not, but his lips moved convulsively, as he muttered, "Knock me down fas' an' den look de do' and took de key. Now I know it was de angel ob de Lord."—T. L. McCREADY, in *Harper's Magazine*.

HOME MISSION COMMITTEE.

The Home Mission Committee for the Western District, will meet in the  
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We invite the cordial co-operation of ministers, elders, and people generally to aid in extending the circulation of the PRESBYTERIAN. Much has been done in this way already; but much still remains undone. Our circulation is now 8,000; there is no good reason why it should not be 10,000! If each of our present subscribers will only send us ANOTHER NAME we shall at once reach 12,000; and then to get the remainder will be a comparatively easy matter. Friends, help us in this particular.

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