

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

God rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay.
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power,
When we were gone astray.
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was born on Christmas Day!

In Bethlehem, in Jewry,
This blessed babe was born,
And laid within a manger;
Upon this blessed morn;
The which His mother Mary
Nothing did take in scorn.
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was born on Christmas Day!

From God, our Heavenly Father,
A blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds
Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name.
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was born on Christmas Day!

Fear not, then said the angel,
Let nothing you affright,
This day is born a Saviour,
Of virtue, power and might,
So frequently to vanquish all
The friends of Satan quite.
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was born on Christmas Day!

SHORTY LONG'S CHRISTMAS GIFT.

BY THOMAS S. COLLIER.

The stage from Marysville toiled slowly up the washed and rolling road that led from Culver's Ranch to Whistling Canon. Shorty Long, the driver, enveloped in a suit of heavy rubber garments, sat far back in the boot, and the two favorite seats beside him were empty.

The mud was deep, and the sharp chirrup with which Shorty usually speeded his horses, was modulated into a lower and gentler note of encouragement. When alone, either in sun or storm, Shorty was accustomed to give vent to his feelings in a song. He was a sailor on a man-of-war at the time of the gold discovery, and under the influence of the fever, that, reaching to the "ends of the earth," gathered the swart Mongolian and the fair-skinned Caucasian into the narrow bounds of a mining-camp had left his ship without waiting for the customary formality of a discharge. He brought to the new and strange life that met him in the camps that grew and disappeared among the foot-hills two characteristics that were sure to make him a marked man. His nature was buoyant, sunny and generous. His chums were never known to despair, and a fatality of good luck attended them; but, strangely enough, this had not yet come to Shorty. With this joyous and hopeful disposition, Shorty combined a determination that was indomitable. He did not know the meaning of defeat.

"It will come out right in the end," he would say, as claim after claim showed the some paucity in the matter of that precious, yellow dust which was the object of his search.

And Shorty said this when he swept through the camp, its red tongues lapping in a hot carnival about the little cabin in which he had gathered a small store of comforts his work had enabled him to collect. For Shorty was a home body, and delighted in a cozy interior glowing with warmth and companionship, and so he had constructed his cabin with more care than miners usually bestowed on these frail structures, and he gloried in possessing the one building in Sandy Gulch that contained a bedroom.

The boys—all of the masculine fraternity were "boys" in the vocabulary of the gold regions—shipped in and bought Shorty enough to build a new home, for they had found it very nice to drop into the snug apartment which did duty as parlor, kitchen and dining-room in Shorty's cabin; but the gift was firmly refused.

"You see, boys," said Shorty, as he stood looking at the heap of ashes that had once been his home; "I have a peculiar notion that if I win to any luck, I must do it alone. You are very kind, and I'm not too good to be helped, but alone's the way, I think, and for a time I'm going to keep clear of the Gulch. The fire has just caught me all aback, so to speak, and I'm like the fag-end of a rope."

When Shorty was deeply moved, he always took refuge in his sea phrases, and the boys saw that he was touched, and Ben Ward called out:

"Shorty is right, boys. If he feels that he must strike paying dirt by himself, we have no right to stand in his way. It's mighty hard to miss the coffee and the songs, but if he thinks it is best, it is best."

Ben was a leader in the thought of the camp, not because he was better equipped in the matter of education, but because he had a sort of rough magnetic force that the men there could recognize; so they agreed with his decision, though two or three declared that it was too bad to lose the coffee, for Shorty was the best maker of that fragrant beverage the camp possessed.

So Shorty ceased to be an inhabitant of Sandy Gulch, and went on the stage-route running from Marysville to the upper mining district. Somewhere he had picked up a good knowledge of horses, and the heavy swinging coach put him "in mind of a ship in an easy

gale," he said—"it just rolled enough to rock one to sleep."

He had carried his singing with him, and many a late traveller on the road his coach followed had heard the pine woods on the slopes echo with the cheering words, telling of the cherub aloft who keeps watch over poor Jack; had heard them repeat the woes of Tom Bowline, and ring with the notes of Hull's Victory.

But Shorty was not singing now. His keen and practiced glance noted the dark clouds that lay, dense and dull, along the eastward rising peaks, and, opening the sliding-panel that allowed him to communicate with the passengers inside, he said:

"We'll be at Bender's in an hour, and we'll stay there for the night."

"Why?" asked a restless young man, who sat in a corner.

"Because the weather looks bad, and an hour's rain would make the mud deeper than the horses could sail through."

"Afraid to travel in the wet, I reckon," said a heavily-bearded man, stretched along the middle seat.

"We'll stop all night at Bender's," said Shorty, taking no notice of the last remark, and, closing the slide, he turned to face the road.

The coach had just reached the crest of a hill, and beyond this, the road wound downwards, and towards a steep mass of rocks, rising in a wide, southward running level. A mist hung over these rocks, and a peculiar grayness pervaded the whole atmosphere. There was a clump of pines at the bend of the road, and as the coach turned these, a hail came from among the trees.

Shorty's hand sought the butt of a pistol that was thrust in a pocket of the boot, and his whip cracked sharply. The horses started forward with a jump, and the coach swung heavily from side to side.

In a few minutes, the stout vehicle would have been beyond the range of pistol shots, but before this could be accomplished, a softer voice came cutting through the storm, the voice of a woman.

"For God's sake, do not leave us here!" it said, and, rising to his feet, Shorty's grasp on the reins tightened, and the sudden check threw the horses back on their haunches, the coach thumping hard against the wheelers.

The jar brought all the passengers to their feet, and the barrels of several pistols showed ominously in the windows that were hurriedly opened.

"What is it?" called the restless young man.

"Robbers?"

"Maybe yes, and maybe no," answered Shorty, and having given this equivocal answer, he called out to the person who had hailed:

"Come out from the windows so that we can see you. We don't want any ambushade trick played on us."

There was a movement in the deeper darkness among the pines, and then two figures appeared—one, that of a man, who leaned heavily on the arm of a woman.

They moved forward slowly, the man evidently walking with difficulty.

Shorty's keen glance searched the wood shadows for other forms, and seeing none, he jumped to the ground, and hurried to the assistance of the woman.

"How came you here in this plight?" he asked, as his strong arm gave its aid to the man's tottering form.

"We were going to Lander's," answered the woman, naming a place where quartz mining had just been commenced. "Father was to superintend the work. We were on horseback, and were met on the ridge here by two men, who took our horses and money."

"Which way did they go?"

"In that direction," pointing southward along the ridge.

"Did they harm you?"

"No, but they shot at father, and the bullet is in his leg. It is only a flesh wound, however."

Shorty whistled.

"Did you see their faces?" he asked, as they reached the coach.

"Yes, one was very fair and slight, with long golden hair. The other was black and heavy."

"I know," said Shorty, sternly.

Shorty opened the door of the coach and looked in. "Make room for two more," he said.

"Move up on the middle seat."

The bearded man grumbled, but the passengers obeyed, and Shorty soon had his new friends snugly settled on the last seat.

"Did they take your luggage?" he said, looking at the woman.

"They cut open my satchel and parcel, and, after looking through their contents, threw them by the trees yonder."

Shorty closed the door, ran to the spot indicated, and soon returned with a rough bundle in his arms. He threw this into the boot, clambered in after it, and the crack of his whip quickly started his horses into a sharp trot.

"He is in a mighty big hurry now," growled the bearded passenger, but the words elicited no response.

The coach had a smooth declivity to traverse, and it ran evenly, though the speed gave the heavy body a slightly swaying motion. Shorty handled his reins with skill, and in a little time, the rambling collection of huts known as Bender's Flat was reached, and the horses drew up, foaming and snorting, in front of the Grand Washington Hotel, the leading establishment of the kind in the section.

It was only a low, one-story shanty, but there were bright fires enlivened with pine cones in every room, and each had a neat array of furniture, though no two pieces were mates.

Still, as the genial host, Ben Lincoln, said, this did not make any difference so long as sheets and towels were clean, and you slept well.

And sheets and towels were always clean in the Grand Washington, and its guests were sure of warmth and good food, and these two facts made its proprietor a noted man in the canon.

As he came out to meet the passengers by coach, Shorty hailed him:

"There's a man inside with a bullet in his leg," he said. "His daughter is with him."

"Strangers?" asked Lincoln, laconically.

"Yes."

"All right. I will look out for them, and have the doctor brought."

"I shall stay here till to-morrow," continued Shorty.

"The weather does look bad."

"Yes, and I have other business, now."

He flung the mail-bag to a man who came up, and then, as the hostler of the hotel took the reins of the forward team, ready to lead the coach away when the passengers and their baggage were landed. Shorty sent a peculiar shrill whistle echoing among the shadows of the cliff, and along the picturesque streets of Bender's.

Having done this, he carefully smoothed out the garments he had found among the pines, and placed them in the cut satchel and parcel that had originally held them.

While he was doing this, men had been gathering from the different cabins, and soon there were quite a number of them collected on the veranda that ran along the front of the Grand Washington.

"What's the row now, Shorty?" questioned one of them, as Shorty rose from his seat.

"Black Bill and his chum are at work in this section again. They stole two horses from strangers who were going to Lander's. One was a woman, and they put a bullet into the man's leg, and left them all aback by the road. I picked them up at the pines, and brought them on."

The account was disjointed and ungrammatical, but it was forcibly uttered, and the men who listened understood it thoroughly.

"Here are the parcels belonging to the women. They were cut open," continued Shorty, showing the satchel and bundle. "To steal, and from a woman, and then to leave strangers by the road in such weather! It should be stopped."

"It must be stopped!" cried several voices.

They were rough men—that motley crowd on the veranda—but they had a deep, though curious, reverence for women—a reverence that gave emphasis to the scorn that Shorty put in the words. "To steal, and from a woman!"

"What is to be done?" said Tom Bruce, the leading spirit of the Bender's Flat miners.

"They went south along the ridge," said Shorty, "and I guess the animals are pretty well jaded, for the road is stiff with mud."

"Then a posse had best mount and follow. Who will go?"

"I will, for one," said Shorty.

"And I—and I!" responded numerous others.

It must be remembered that the work these men volunteered to do was not a mere ride after lawless men. The desperate character of the masses congregated at the mines is well known, and it was seldom that one who had broken the law surrendered without a struggle. The readiness with which the most of that rough class used a pistol gave to the duty for which these men were banded together a spice of danger that brought death very near. They thought that two, or more, of them would be shot, but they had little or no fear of death. Lawless as they were in a certain way, they had a respect for life and property that made them willing to meet danger in its behalf.

"We will not need more than ten men, and we should start at once. I will be ready in a few minutes," said Shorty, springing from the coach with the parcel he had arranged in his hand.

Entering the hotel, he looked into the apartment designated as "the parlor," but it was empty.

"Where is the woman who came by the coach?" he asked of the servant who answered his call.

"With her father in the big bedroom."

"Just say that if she can come, I would like to speak with her."

The servant quickly disappeared, and a few seconds later there was the rustle of a dress in the hallway, and a light step came rapidly toward the parlor.

Shorty stood just inside the door, and as the woman came forward, removed his hat.

"Excuse my sending for you," he said, looking into one of the most pleasant faces he had ever seen, "but I wished to hand you these, and to ask what kind of valuables those men took from you?"

"We had a little money—nearly three hundred dollars—and watches. They also took my mother's ring; it was a diamond, and I prized it highly."

"Would you be able to recognize the robbers if you saw them?"

"I should."

"Thank you. We expect to catch them. How is your father?"

"Comfortable. The wound is not dangerous, but he is growing old, and the pain is harder for him than it would be for me."

"I will not keep you from him now, for here comes the doctor, but I will see you, with your permission, when I return with the men who took your horses."

"I shall be pleased to receive you at any time," she answered, smiling, and Shorty's heart beat faster than it had for years, for though the woman before him was not beautiful, there was a sweetness about her face, an honesty in her clear, blue eyes, that made her very charming to this man, whose life had been passed in rough and troubled ways.

He left her at the door, and passed into the bar-room, where he ordered a horse and a warm drink. Then he threw off his heavy rubber suit, and put on a shaggy monkey-jacket. A pair of pistols were thrust into the inside pocket of this, and a short-barreled rifle was slung across his shoulder. Having swallowed his warm drink, Shorty sought the veranda, where he found a score or more of men waiting. Several horses, saddled and ready for a mount, stood near, and two or three men on horseback were approaching. The animal destined for Shorty's use was brought, and Sam Bruce said:

"We might as well mount. The sooner we start, the sooner will this matter be settled."

"All right," replied Shorty and the rest of the men, and as the two leaders sprang into their saddles, the remainder of the party followed their example; and ranging by two's, they struck into a sharp gallop, going up the slope towards the pines.

Reaching these, a halt was called, and the trail of the robbers sought. A minute sufficed to find this, for the soft ground showed that two horses had recently gone south along the ridge, and the track was easy to follow.

Again the pursuing party went rapidly forward, Bruce and Shorty at their head. The clouds, which had grown darker, now began to toss and break, and the wind came blustering across the level. Now and then a flurry of rain would sweep past, but silently the men rode on, the keen eyes of their leaders watching the trail.

"They have not speeded their animals," said Shorty, as the tracks grew fresher. "We will overtake them before they reach the Gulches."

"If we do not, we might as well turn back," said Bruce.

They were nearing a slope, and beyond this a wide level stretched away to the south and east; westward, a steep ascent led to pine-clothed ridges, and beyond the level rose heavy crags, broken by the black shadow of sombre gulches. As they reached the crest of the decline, they saw, about one-third of the way across the level, two horsemen, whose slow pace told of weary steeds.

"There they are!" said Shorty. "Now for a race!" and putting spurs to his horse—a powerful and wiry animal—he dashed forward.

Silently his companions followed, and though the rapid pace of the horses fell with a dull thud on the wet earth, the wind kept the noise from reaching the two men, who, not thinking of pursuit, gave no heed to the trail they had made.

The pursuers had gained more than a mile before the slightest of the two started, turned hurriedly in his saddle, and, with a cry, put spurs to his horse. His companion followed his example, and now, seeing that their approach had been discovered, Shorty and his party began to urge their animals forward with loud cries of encouragement.

The only hope of the pursued lay in reaching the gulches, but the distance before them was considerable, and their horses were far more jaded than were those of their opponents. Still the two men settled down to their purpose with a bitter determination. They knew that justice in the mining regions had but one punishment, death! and that pardon was an unknown thing.

Suddenly the horse of the heavier man stumbled and fell, throwing his rider clear—a fortunate thing, as otherwise the fall might have crushed him. With an oath, he sprang to his feet, and grasped the bridle. The horse staggered up, but stood, frightened and trembling, in his tracks.

The man sprang into the saddle, and urged the horse forward; but the exertion was useless; the stunned animal would not move. His companion had missed him from his side, and now returned to his aid.

"Go! go!" he shouted. "There is no use for more than one of us to die."

The only answer the other made was to fling himself from the saddle, and with his pistol firmly grasped, watch from behind his horse the swift approach of his foes. These had spread out in a half-circle, Bruce and Shorty at the ends of the advance, and they were rapidly nearing.

"What shall we do—fire?" asked the young man.

"We might kill a couple of them, but it would only make it worse for us. In the Gulches yonder this would count, but now—the fact is, we are caught, and all because of this cursed beast. I'm sorry I got you into this scrape."

"Never mind that. Is it surrender?"

"What else can we do?"

"I will tell you. I did not fire the shot this morning. You can take my horse and escape."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the other. "That would be a pretty story to tell—Black Bill deserted his partner. No, my boy. Let's give up, and luck may put a chance for escape in our way. Can you make out who leads these men?"