

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

WHY NOT TO-DAY.

It was New Year's Day. There had been a big storm, and, although the wind had spent its force, the snow still fell steadily.

"Regular winter weather and no mistake about it," observed Mr. Richard Hunt, as he came in rather noisily, stamping the snow from his boots; "but I like it. So cold and bracing."

Mrs. Hunt who was sitting near an open Franklin stove, laughed. "I like the house best such a day as this," she said, shivering a little. "I don't believe I'd be willing to face the cold, even for the sake of the bracing."

"I think I heard you say you were going to see old Mrs. Helfer to-day," Mr. Hunt remarked, as he seated himself comfortably. "Have you changed your mind?"

"Yes, I've changed my mind. I'll have to wait until some other day. Poor old Mrs. Helfer!"

"Is she sick?"

"Some other day will do as well—I'll wait," she questioned.

"Not if she needs you to-day. Come, get on your wraps and I'll go with you."

"Why, Richard Hunt, what's got into you? I thought you never liked calling, especially at such places."

"You thought right, my dear," smiling pleasantly, "but can you tell me what there is to prevent my turning over a new leaf on New Year's Day?"

She laughed. "It would be a very good idea," she said.

"Well, then, encourage me in it."

"So I will. She rose at once and was soon ready to face the storm, with a basket on her arm."

"What's in it?" Mr. Hunt asked, as he relieved his wife of the basket.

"Sugar and spice and everything nice," she quoted.

A little maid opened the door when they reached Mrs. Helfer's. To Mrs. Hunt's question as to how the latter was, the child answered: "She'm not very well, ma'am," and then lowering her voice to a confidential whisper, "I guess she'm lonesome. She bin crying."

The weary old face brightened when little Polly led the callers in, but both Mr. and Mrs. Hunt were observant, and read "between the lines" that the dear old lady was not only sorrowful but troubled.

"I wish you a Happy New Year," Mrs. Hunt said, taking the thin old hands in a close grasp.

"Happy New Year!" Mr. Hunt echoed, his greeting as cordial as his wife's.

"Thank you," responded the old lady, warmly, "and I wish you both a Happy New Year."

"We had a fine turkey for dinner to-day," said Mr. Hunt, "and I rather think my wife brought you a piece," uncovering the basket. "Yes, sure enough, here it is."

The trio chatted pleasantly for a little while, and then Mr. Hunt arose suddenly. "I've thought of an errand or two," he said. "I'll not be gone long."

He met the small maid in the hall. "Polly," he said, "I don't want to pry into Mrs. Helfer's affairs, but I'm really anxious to know if she has everything she needs. She's an old friend, you know, and a friend of my mother's. Does she need anything, Polly?"

"Yes, sir, 'deed she do; but she didn't say so. She ain't no complainer, that's what she ain't. She ain't had no coffee since—since—"

"Go on, Polly, talk fast. Since when?"

"Since her money took wings an' flew. I dunno where it flew to, but that's what some one said—it flew, an' she don't hev butter no more. I wanted to tell the grocer boy we was out, but Mrs. Helfer she said, 'No, not now, Polly; some other time.'"

"It doesn't seem hardly warm enough in the house, Polly. Do you have plenty of coal?"

"That's what we don't, sir," she said, with decision. "We'em jess about out. I guess by t'ermorrer it'll be all gone. Mrs. Helfer's a'most a-shakin' with cold sometimes. She had two shawls aroun' her when you rung the bell, but she took 'em off."

Mr. Hunt had heard enough—quite enough.

"Poor, dear soul," he said to himself, as he went on his ministering journey.

He kept his promise—he was not gone long. He put a bunch of bright carnations into the old lady's hand, and then he said to his wife, smilingly, that it was time to "move on."

Polly led them out of the front door. Returning to the room, she found the old lady in a rapture of joy.

"Look, Polly," she cried, in a glee that was like a child's.

And Polly looked and laughed. What she saw was sliced turkey, dainty biscuit, a print of butter, a mince pie, a frosted plum cake, oranges, grapes, nuts, raisins and candy.

"Oh, my," cried Polly, "what a fine New Year we do be havin' after all!"

Presently the grocer's boy delivered a heavily-filled basket and a message.

"Till yer missus Buck Peters send he'd be here t'ermorrer mornin' at eight o'clock, sure."

"What for?" asked the amazed Polly.

"What for?" mockingly. "Why, to bring the load of coal, of course."

"Oh, my! I believe there's fairies aroun'—I do so!" And, after closing the door on the grocer's boy, Polly felt inclined to stand on her head by way of celebrating the delightful new state of things.

She left the basket standing in the hall, as it was too heavy for her to attempt to carry; but she could smell the coffee and look that package with her, also two or three more.

"Oh, Miss Helfer," she exclaimed, "another big basket's come, an' it's jes' full o' everything. Here's coffee for you—an' an' tea an' sugar. An' t'ermorrer there's a big load o' coal a-comin'."

"Polly!"

"Yes, mum."

"What does it mean—all that great basket of things you're telling about, and the coal coming to-morrow?"

"I dunno."

"But who sent the groceries? Who is going to send the coal?"

Polly looked mystified. She stood boring the toe of her old shoe into the rug. Suddenly a light broke over her face.

"I guess it's the Lord, ma'am. You said the Lord ud provide—I heard you—an' he's done it."

The old lady folded her hands.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul," she said, fervently.

"I've thought of something, Miss Helfer," Polly suddenly broke out, excitedly. "I guess Mr. Richard Hunt's a-bin a-helpin' the Lord."

The old lady smiled.—Selected.

CANCELLATION.

Most of us have studied cancellation in school. Here is a kind that can be studied in vacation. Two boys were speaking of a third. "He is so slow in games!" said one.

"Yes," replied the other; "but he always plays fair."

"He is so stupid at school!" said the first.

"But he studies hard," returned the second.

Every unkind word was cancelled by a kind one. The next time one of us hears an unkind word, let us see if we cannot cancel it.—Selected.

The trimmer who shirks his duty through fear or love of ease, is despicable.

THE SNOW-MAN'S SECRET.

"Walter Willis has stolen my bat," declared Hugh. "I am sure of it. He always has wanted it, and tried to trade with me several times, and now it's gone. I can't find it anywhere!"

"Do not speak in such a positive way, Hugh," remonstrated his mother. "You should be very slow to accuse another of theft. Think what an injury you might do to the reputation of an innocent person."

"But Walter isn't innocent. He has taken my bat, and I shall not have anything more to do with him!"

Days and weeks passed. Walter Willis wondered what had come over Hugh, his friend and nearest neighbor. He nodded, and spoke as usual across the fence, but received no answering smile. Hugh remained as cold as the big snow man they had made the first snowy days. It was quite as bad at school, where they were in the same grade. Hugh was unapproachable, and several times Walter caught his playmate frowning angrily in his direction. At last, one day at recess he stroled near a group of which Hugh was the centre, and heard the whisper, with meaning glances in his direction, "Thief!"

Walter understood at once. Hugh was accusing him of stealing something, and evidently the rest believed the story. He clinched his fists for a minute, and came near striking Hugh, without waiting for an explanation. Then, for he was a self-controlled little gentleman, he swallowed his wrath and turned away.

From that day he did not try to make peace with Hugh, and the misunderstanding became a silent misery to both. Walter did not know what the trouble was, and pride forbade him to try to find out. Hugh began to fear that he had been hasty, and that maybe his playmate had not taken the bat, after all, but pride was too strong for him, too, and he had not the courage to take back the accusation.

The winter passed, and the icy grip of the frost king began to loosen a little. The pond at the foot of the garden thawed first; then the huge icicles fell from the eaves, one by one. Finally, one morning, Hugh, looking from the window, exclaimed, "Mother, the snow man's melting."

Sure enough he was, and the old stovepipe hat had slipped from his head.

"What's that I see sticking up through his neck?" questioned his mother. "A stick!"

Hugh grew pale, and his blue eyes widened.

"Oh, mother," he cried remorsefully, "that is my bat! Walter and I put it in there when we made him! Oh, why didn't I ask Walter if he knew where it was when I first missed it? He never will forgive me!"

"Well, you learned two lessons," said his mother. "One is that it is a great mistake to accuse another of crime without proof. The other is that half our quarrels would be made up at once, if we sought an explanation from the other party right away. Now go and make your apologies to Walter."

"Yonder he is now," exclaimed Hugh, and sped away to make up with his playmate.

The latter received his shamefaced apology readily.

"But O Hugh," he said reproachfully, "if you only had come and asked me about it in the first place, what a lot of trouble it would have saved us both!"—The Morning Star.

How true it is that "the curse of your life and my life is its littleness!" Large views of life; large plans for God, large use of means of grace, large faith in our heavenly Father, large love for the lost, will cure this curse of littleness.