

❖ ❖ The Story Page ❖ ❖

Why Not Today.

BY ERNEST OILMORE.

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," observed Mr. Richard Hunt, as he came in 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 heard you say you were going to see old Mrs. Helfer today?"

"Yes, but I'll have to wait until some other day. Poor Mrs. Helfer!"

"Is she sick?"

"Yes."

"I suppose she's very lonely since her daughter died?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't wonder if she has a struggle to make both ends meet since that bank failure?"

"I don't believe she does make the ends meet. I feel very sorry for her."

"But not quite sorry enough for you to go and see her as you had intended to do today?" teasingly.

"Some other day will do as well—will it not?"

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

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

"You thought right, my dear, 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 good idea," she said.

"Well, then, encourage me in it."

"So I will."

She arose 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 awful lonesome. She bin crying—I saw her."

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 clasp.

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

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

"Now, Dick," said his wife, "you've made your speech; sit down, please."

He sat down with a sigh, pretending to feel hurt. He looked so comical that Mrs. Helfer's spirits arose so far that she laughed.

"I am greatly obliged to you both for remembering me," she said. "I'm going to confess that I've been longing for some turkey for a week, and now 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. "You can have the floor to yourselves until I return. 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; 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's boy we was out, but Mrs. Helfer she say, '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'm jess about out. I guess by tomorrow it'll be all gone. Miss Helfer's a most a'shakin' with cold sometimes. She had two shawls around her when you rung the bell, but she took 'em off."

Mr. Hunt had heard enough—quiet enough.

"Poor dear old soul!" he said to himself as he went out 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 let them out of the front door. Returning to the room, she found the old lady in a rapture of joy. There were tears in her eyes, but she was smiling. The fragrant, rosy carnations were still in her hand. On the low chair beside her was the basket that the Hunts had brought.

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

And Polly looked and laughed. What she saw was a plate of sliced turkey, dainty biscuits, 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.

"Tell yer missus Buck Bowers said he'd be here tomorrow mornin' at eight o'clock sure."

"What for?" asked the amazed Polly.

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

"Oh! I b'lieve 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 took that package with her, also two or three more.

"Oh, Miss Helfer," she exclaimed, "another big basket's come, an' it's jes' full of everything. Here's coffee for you; an' an' 'tea an' sugar. An' tomorrow there's a big load o' coal a-comin'."

"Polly!"

"Yes, mum."

"What does it all mean—all that great basket of things, your telling about and the coal coming tomorrow?"

"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 sed the Lord ud provide—I heard you—an' he's done it."

The old lady folded her hands.

"Bless the Lord, oh, 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.

"We have the same thoughts about it, Polly, you and I," she said.—Midland Christian Advocate.

Charlie's Diary—A New Year's Story.

BY ELIZABETH PRICE.

Tomorrow'll be New Year's Day. It's just a year since mamma gave me my diary.

It was a beauty—red leather cover, little pencil tied to it, and lots of clean white leaves. I wondered what all would get written down there, and it made me feel so solemn I thought as much as five minutes before I began to put down my resolutions. My brother Harris showed me how. So I wrote:

First, Resolved, that I shall get up on time every morning this year, so I won't have to eat cold things.

Second, Resolved, not to forget to put my school books on the shelf where they belong, because it's so much trouble to hunt 'em up when you're in a hurry.

Third, Resolved, to hang up my coat and cap every time. Also to wipe my skates dry so they won't get rusty; also not leave my bicycle on the pavement when I come home from a ride, because it got stolen once and we had a hard time to get it back.

Fourth, Resolved, I will be respectful to grandpa, even when I don't feel like it, and honor my father and mother, also study my lessons every day, and my Sabbath school lesson every Sabbath; also not to tie firecrackers on dogs' tails on the Fourth of July; also not put pepper on the stove at school to get a half holiday.

Fifth, Resolved, I will not meddle with Harris's shoe polish or books, or borrow his neckties without asking him, also will not squabble with him unless he begins it.

Sixth, Resolved, I will be kind to my school teachers and all my other enemies. So no more at present.

Being a boy, of course I write pretty big, and my resolutions took up about twelve pages of my new diary. Somehow it didn't look as neat as I meant it should. Harris asked me if I'd tipped over the ink bottle, and I said no, and he said, "Small boy, let the appearance of those resolutions be to you a warning instead of an example." He

knows if there's anything I hate it's for him to call me that, for I'm eleven years old and big for my age, so I said; "Shut up," and he said, "I'm not a jackknife, therefore I cannot shut up." Then I made a face, then he laughed, then mamma said, "Boys!" and Harris went upstairs, and I wrote in my diary. "January 1, squabbled with Harris; his fault." Just as I crossed the last "t," grandpa said, "Charles, will you go to the drug store and get me some horehound drops? My cough annoyed me so I couldn't sleep last night." I said, "Oh, pshaw, grandpa, 'tain't night now. I'm going coasting, but I'll get 'em on my way home sure pop." "You'll forget them, Charles. You always do," grandpa said.

"No, I won't either. When a feller promises ain't that enough?"

It would take too long to tell all about it, but I'll just read you a piece of my diary after I got through that New Year's day:

"Forgot grandpa's cough drop. Papa had to go out in the storm at bedtime to get them. Sorry."

"Couldn't find me new necktie anywhere. Harris wasn't there to ask; wore his and fell in a snowdrift and spoiled it with melted snow. I am sorry, so is he."

"Late to all three meals. Bridget saved me a stingy little piece of pie."

"Took my bicycle out of its place to get my sled; forgot to put it back. Patrick stumbled over it, nearly fell down the cellar stairs. Bridget called me names; s'pose I won't get any pie to-morrow."

After I'd written 'em down I felt so disappointed I'd have cried if I'd been a little fellow. Maybe I sort of sniffed for next thing I knew my mamma was there, and she said, "What's the trouble, dear?" I said, "I don't know. I meant to keep my resolutions a whole year, and I've broken 'em all the first day. I'm afraid a diary ain't much good." Mamma sat down and pulled me onto her lap, and asked me, "Did you ask for help to keep your resolutions, or did you depend on yourself?"

"Didn't think I'd need any help for just these."

"Have you found out your mistake, or do you want to try for the next three hundred and sixty-four days to keep yourself good?"

"I don't want to try any more." Then she asked me if I knew where to look for help, and I said, "Yes'm," and all of a sudden I saw what a regular goose I'd been. Next day she gave me a clean new diary, and on its first page she wrote, "Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise him that I will try to do whatever he would like to have me do."

Of course, that was better than all the resolutions I could make. Oh, yes, I've done wrong any amount of times, but it's the biggest sort of help to me all the same. My chum says his father don't believe in pledges and he don't either, but I believe in anything that'll help a feller to be good, and I know that New Year's resolutions he makes up out of his own head won't do it.—Ex.

Ned's New Year's Resolutions.

"This being the first day of the year A. D. 1903, it is just and right that I make some suitable resolutions for the day. Therefore, be it

"Resolved, That during the coming year I will strive, as far as possible, to do unto others as I would be done by. (Signed) Edward Lawrence."

"There, now, that's done right up in a business manner, I think," said Ned, proudly surveying the paper. "I expect it will be pretty hard work," he added, ruefully.

"Edward, my son," said his father, directly after breakfast, "will you clean off the walks the first thing this morning?"

"Oh, dear," Ned was beginning, when he thought of his resolution, and he answered promptly:

"Yes, father, I'll see to it at once," and started off with a merry whistle.

His father looked in surprise, for Ned had been much given to the whining when asked to do anything.

When he came in his mother asked him to go on an errand for her, and he went at once, notwithstanding he was anxious to read a book he had received Christmas.

When he did get a chance to read he found that his sister was reading the book.

"Give me my book," he cried.

"Oh, Ned, I'm right in the middle of a chapter, and it is so interesting. Might I just finish this chapter?"

"No," he answered crossly. "You had no right to get my book."

Then as he noticed her regretful face he thought: "Now I guess that's not just as I'd be done by," and added: "Well, finish the chapter then, Nellie."

"Oh, Ned," exclaimed his little brother, "won't you show me how to spin my new top?"

"Not 'now, Freddie; I'm reading don't you see?"

"But I'm lonesome," pleaded the little fellow, "and I can't do it right."

"Come here," said Ned, suddenly recollecting himself