

The Altered Christmas

(Continued from page 22)

all play together in the evenings; and Marie wants a book—she can read it alone. If I got three sweaters alike maybe they'll throw off some. I'd like to get Hiram some slippers. It seems as though I ought to get him a present the first year we're married, and she smiled happily. "He's such a good man. I'm a pretty lucky woman."

"I'll use my next week's grocery money and get a chicken—we really can't afford a turkey—but I'll bake it with dressing, and they won't know the difference."

Her Christmas Gifts

She was fortunate enough to find what she wanted at prices to suit her purse, and two hours after she had stood in the stairway, she crept quietly into bed with a very satisfied feeling in her heart. In addition to her other purchases she had bought some little candles, for the grocer had given her some tinsel rope "to make the tree look pretty." That was the first she had thought of a tree, but she was glad he had spoken of it.

Long before daylight the next morning she aroused her husband. "Hiram," she whispered, "I want you to go out and cut a little tree."

"Cut what?" he asked, hardly awake.

"A little evergreen, a Christmas tree, for the children, you know. You can find something that will do back on the marah." The Stephens lived just on the edge of the country town.

"All right," agreed Hiram, and made no comment.

When he returned she had a fire in the little-used parlor, and they fixed the tree in the farthest corner of the room. Then Mrs. Stephens brought out her array of presents, and placed

them to good advantage on the branches. Mr. Stephens went out to the woodshed and returned with a parcel.

"I stayed overtime to-night to accommodate a man that wanted some work in a hurry—that's what made me late for supper. I charged him extra for it, so I bought these for the kids."

His wife gave a cry of pleasure as she opened the parcel. "Read caps!

Stephens slipped into the parlor and lighted the tree, and then called them.

There were shrill cries of delight from the pleased children, and then, to the surprise of the parents, Marie turned and ran from the room, closely followed by the other two.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the puzzled Hiram.

"I don't know," replied his wife miserably. "Didn't they like it?" But in an instant the three were

silver tinkle for her mother. In the box was a card that said "I love you," and it was signed "Mary." Lastly, she supposed it was last, Mrs. Stephens gave her husband the slippers. He was pleased, with the pleasure that only comes to those who have not every wish gratified. Then he reached high up on the tree and took down a little sparkling thing that Mrs. Stephens had not noticed among the tinsel lodged there.

"Here's a ring," he said awkwardly. "I couldn't afford to buy it when we were married, but I want you to have it now. You do everything for the rest of us, and don't buy a thing for yourself. Let's all give her a kiss, children."

"Land sakes! I must get that chicken in the oven!" expostulated his wife, to keep from showing emotion.

That night, at the end of their happy day, Laura and Gerrie lingered after Marie had gone to bed.

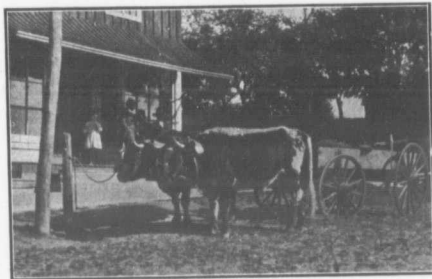
"Ma," said Laura, "I think that you are the very best woman that there is. You always have warm meals for us, and a clean house, and mended clothes. I love you."

"I think so, too," affirmed Gerrie. Mrs. Stephens smiled at the unconscious plagiarism, for she knew that the sentiment was their own.

"I never realized before," she said softly to Hiram, "that a person could be so busy working for their children and trying to get ahead in the world for their sakes, that they almost forget to show that they love 'em."



We have but one life to live. We cannot make too much of it. The great danger is that we will fall short of what we might attain. But if we are careful to maintain our standards, they will help us to achieve commendable success.



A Relic of By-gone Days in Norfolk Co., Ont.

—Photo by an Editor of Farm and Dairy.

And see, they just match the sweaters. Won't they be pleased? Laura and Gerrie have been teasing for both."

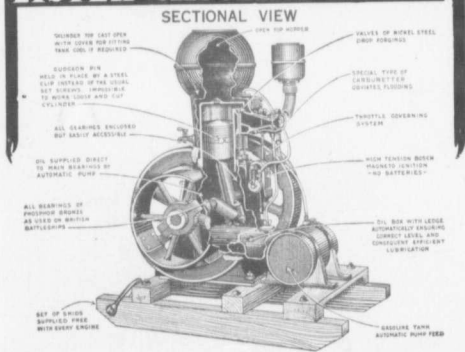
When everything was ready they closed the parlor door, and called the children to breakfast. The father wondered that they seemed unusually quiet over their oatmeal, but the mother thought she knew the reason. Before they were quite through Mr.

back with shining faces.

"Bless your hearts! Of course you wouldn't forget Pa and Ma."

Gerrie had laboriously manufactured two holders, "one for Pa when he takes out the ashes, and the other for Ma when she bakes." Laura had evolved a blotter and a calendar, and Marie had hemmed a handkerchief for her father; but with money she had earned herself she had bought a

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