

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

JACOB TOTTLES AND HIS WIFE
RACHEL.

A Newfoundland Christmas Tale.

In the whole of Newfoundland there is no prettier or more picturesque village than Punch Bowl. It lies nestling snugly in a deep hollow, completely encircled by hills—hence its name. In one direction there is a narrow opening in this hilly rampart, through which a little brook rushes impetuously, and after winding its way among huge boulders and forming several tiny cascades, overhung by the dark fir trees or the branches of the mountain-ash, it ends all its brawlings and frettings in the peaceful bosom of the little harbour, on both sides of which the village of Punch Bowl is built. In summer, the surrounding hills are covered to their summits with the bright green foliage of the poplar, birch, aspen, spruce and mountain-ash, the open spaces near the top, or "barrens," as they are locally termed, being occupied by berry-bearing bushes of all kinds. A sort of leafy bower thus encircles the little village. When autumn comes, these woods present a joyous sight—an amphitheatre of golden glories—masses of the deepest orange relieved and thrown forward by the sombre green of the firs, and intermingled with purple, lake and red. In winter, again, these hills are snow-clad, and, with their white bosoms, seem to draw closer together, brooding over and guarding from the wintry blasts the little nest of humanity below. An indescribable air of snugness is thus imparted to Punch Bowl.

The narrow valley, at the bottom of which the village lies, cuts transversely the huge wall of rock, two or three hundred feet in height, which forms the eastern coast of Newfoundland; an opening for the admission of the sea is thus made, and a snug little harbour has been formed. A narrow channel, only deep enough for small fishing craft, connects the harbour with the ocean. Once anchored inside the boats of the fishermen are safe from the wild wrath of the Atlantic that is thundering against the dark cliffs without, and charging up the bold headlands in desperate fury. When a south-east gale is blowing and hurling the watery battalions on the shore, there is something grand in the boom of ocean as it comes over the "South-side hill" at Punch Bowl—like the distant bellowings of some mighty organ uttering a wild, stormy piece of music. Then, when a gentle breeze blows, there comes over the hill tops the soft murmuring of "many-voiced ocean," making a sweet and soothing melody.

Punch Bowl contains a population of about 800 souls, who are, generation after generation, engaged in working the silvery quarries of the sea. The whole of their subsistence is drawn from the surrounding ocean. Their thoughts are mainly sea-ward, and their aspirations, hopes and fears are bound up with the changing aspects, the frowns and smiles of old ocean. They do not look upon it altogether as an object of dread and terror; for though it has been the grave of many of their kindred, and has torn from their bosoms many a loved one, yet is it not, too, the bountiful mother, bringing rich treasures to their doors, "filling their hearts with food and gladness," and lavishing upon them, without any sowing or ploughing, a perennial harvest? If terrible in its wrath, it is also at times generous and gentle. The land is barren—it is nothing to them but a place to dry their nets and cure their fish; but "their home is on the deep," and the stalwart men have learned to lay their fearless hands on ocean's bristled neck. All around this little sea-haven, they have built their cottages,—in some places overhanging the water, in others perched among the clefts of the rock—but without any attempt at regular streets. Each man plants his cottage according to convenience or fancy, and a winding path conducts from the one to the other. The "fish-stages," on which the fish are landed, project over the edge of the harbour, and the "flakes" for drying the cod, formed of a horizontal platform, supported on upright poles, and covered with boughs, fringe the whole margin of the harbour and occupy every nook among the rocks. A fine aroma of cod pervades the atmosphere during the fishing season. Secluded here from the rest of the world, a quaint population has grown up, having a strongly pronounced individuality, along with the ideas and habits which characterise the fisher-folk everywhere. Their manners are unsophisticated, as may be supposed, and of the ways of the great world they know nothing. Seldom does a stray newspaper find its way to Punch Bowl, for as yet they have not felt the need of a post-office; and the amount of education imparted to the young is not likely to develop the brain unduly, to the detriment of the stomach.

Christmas Day, 1870, dawned bright and joyous on Punch Bowl. Great preparations had been made for the proper observance of the day. Hardly a living goose or turkey was

to be seen. By tens and dozens they had been slaughtered; and, distended with sage, onions and other items, they awaited the "bake-pot." Never within the memory of the oldest inhabitant had so much Christmas beef come round from St. John's. The parson's wife was astounded by the number of presents that poured in on Christmas Eve, and the shrieks of delight from her numerous brood, as parcel after parcel was opened, were loud and continuous. The summer's fishery had been prosperous, and the determination to welcome jolly Christmas in a generous fashion was universal. The joints of beef, wedges of cake and junks of pork that found their way to poor Widow Noseworthy's cottage brightened her old eyes, warmed her heart, and suspended for a time her rheumatic pains. Old Reuben Vatcher, who had seen better days, and with whom, in his declining years, the world had gone hard, began to think more kindly of his race and to believe more in human and divine love, when, on Christmas Eve, a new set of warm flannels, a pair of boots and a plum pudding arrived at his door. In the window of the only shop Punch Bowl could boast of, the display was gorgeous. The tobacco-pipes, red herring, and cotton reels which usually adorned it were swept away, and their places were filled with raisins, currants, candied lemon-peel, figs, luscious apples and golden oranges. A succession of fights among the village urchins was kept up, opposite this earthly paradise, for the nearest place to the window, where the eye could feast on the ravishing contents. Bob Stivey and Nat Vokcy had a "set-to" here, and the former carried home a black eye to his mother who very properly applied an active counter-irritant with a rod, on the softest part of his person, by way of cure. On all hands the show was pronounced "bully," among the gamins. The amiable and venerable Santa Claus did not take Punch Bowl in his rounds. Belief in him would have been too great a stretch for the imagination of the Punch Bowlers, young or old. They stuck to the solid realities of life and looked forward, with unsentimental delight, but keen appetites, to the Christmas dinner. The village church had been decorated with much taste, and the largest congregation of the year was on Christmas Day. All regarded attendance at church on that day as a proper preliminary to the coming enjoyments.

There was, however, one exception to this general sentiment in favour of church-going on Christmas Day. This was Jacob Tottles, a well-to-do fisherman who, with his wife Rachel, occupied a rather snug detached cottage at the end of the village. The pair were childless; but Jacob toiled and grubbed early and late as if he had a large family to provide for. A grim-visaged, dogged, unsocial man was Jacob Tottles, not much loved by his neighbours. His meek wife Rachel, whether she "loved and honoured him," in accordance with her marriage-vow, was, at all events, obliged to "obey and serve him." Jacob was a hard, worldly man—"of the earth earthy,"—who seemed to care for nothing but gain. He never went to church, and had no more sense of religion than Tennyson's "Northern Farmer" who, on Sundays, was merely conscious that the parson was "bummin' away" above his head. His temper was correctly described by Rachel as "contrairy." He was never known to part with anything for a charitable object. By dint of toiling, screwing, and half starving himself and Rachel, he had managed to accumulate so much that he was regarded as a millionaire among the fishermen of Punch Bowl, and was believed to possess piles of dollars stowed in the nooks and crannies of his cottage.

When Jacob Tottles rose, on this bright Christmas morning, he remarked to his wife Rachel that it was a fine day for overhauling certain herring-nets he had set outside the "heads," and that he felt confident, from certain indications, that he would find a grand "take." In vain did Rachel remonstrate, and remind him that it was Christmas Day—that everyone would be at church, and that she had made certain preparations for an unusual dinner. He wasted no words in replying, but he took his oars on his shoulder and ordered Rachel to fasten the door, to shut in the pig and to follow him to the boat, her aid being indispensable in taking up the nets. Just as the Punch Bowlers were "cleaning themselves" for church, and as Job Pritchett was hoisting the flag which, instead of a bell, informed the people of the hour for service, Jacob and Rachel were seen "pulling" their boat down the harbour towards the "narrows," to the intense horror of the whole population, and in defiance of all decency and decorum. Mrs. Mollowney, on witnessing the sight, declared that "that ould nay-ger would come to a bad end, one day," and the parson remarked to his wife that "the strong arm of the law should lay hold on such an old Pagan and put him in the lock-up, for such an outrage on a Christian community." Utterly indifferent to the opinion of his neighbours Jacob held on, and in due time arrived at his nets. His largest expectations were more than realised. His nets were almost chuck full. Never before had he obtained such a "haul," and as he dragged in fold after fold, full of silvery herrings, till the boat was almost filled, his

spirits rose to the highest pitch—"Eh, Ratch-el, what d'ye think of this, old ooman. This-ams fine—I'd alossed all this ef I'd agone to hear the Parson. Ye'd ago to church long before ye'd get a couple of barrel of herrin." Exultingly Jacob turned his boat's head homeward; but as he came abreast of Mrs. Critch's cottage, he saw a huge volume of smoke rolling out of her kitchen chimney, and the thought struck him that in all probability a good dinner was under weigh here, and that he could not do better than dine with Mrs. Critch, who had the pleasure of being his mother-in-law. "Ratch-el," he said, "we'd better call and enquire for your mother." He fastened his boat securely to the cross-bars of the little fishing stage, and he and Rachel landed and were invited hospitably to share Mrs. Critch's Christmas dinner. After spending three or four hours entirely to his own satisfaction, he prepared to return home, and walked down to the little stage where his boat was fastened. To his consternation he found that the tide had risen five or six feet, during his absence, and tilted the boat up, the bow being fast between the cross bars of the stage, and emptied the whole "take" of herring back into the ocean, whence they came. The rage and disappointment of Jacob, at this unlooked-for catastrophe, may be imagined but cannot be described. He stamped and swore, the miserable old curmudgeon, and said it was all owing to "Ratch-el's confounded old mother—if her house hadn't been in the way this wuddn't have happened." "Jekup Tottles," said Rachel, solemnly, "this-ams a jidmint on ye for fishin' on Christmas Day." Growling and swearing he scrambled into the boat, and completely crest-fallen, made his way up the harbour as the evening was closing.

We must now go back a little in our story, in order to see what took place at Jacob's cottage during his absence. The pig had been shut up in his usual quarters by the obedient Rachel. Now this pig was of a sprightly, active race, shrewd and enterprising, and fond of investigating anything and everything. Like most of his kind, he was possessed of a perfect independence of character, and had a contempt for man and his ways, and a stern determination not to adapt himself to any of man's notions. So long as he was well fed he lay in his straw, grunting with a deep sensual satisfaction; but he would "stand no nonsense" in regard to his meals. Great was the pig's astonishment, on this Christmas Day, when the usual hour for dinner arrived, and there was no appearance of Rachel with the supplies. He speedily burst through the little gate that shut him in, and assaulted the kitchen door with loud imperative grunts. Receiving no answer after repeated summonses, he inserted his long snout under the door and lifted it off the hinges. He was now completely master of the situation, and commenced a searching investigation, upsetting pots and pans, smashing various articles of crockery-ware, and carrying general devastation into Rachel's trim kitchen. The first thing of a digestible character on which he lighted was a pudding—a sort of cross between a "dough-boy" and a plum pudding, which Rachel had manufactured for the day's dinner. He ate it, cloth and all, but it merely served to whet his appetite. Attracted by the smell of vegetables, he next made his way into the cellar where these were kept, and here he found himself at home. Jacob's cellar was particularly well stocked, and the pig helped himself liberally. He first tried a lot of fine kidney potatoes which Jacob was saving for seed, and thought them excellent. Then he laid down a secondary stratum of fine white cabbages, and his grunts proclaimed that he considered these about the best he had tasted. Jacob's "bog" and "snow-ball" potatoes, on which he so prided himself, were next laid under contribution, and the turnip "bin" also received a share of attention. Never did pig enjoy such a jolly Christmas dinner. True to his hoggish nature, he ate till a gentle grunt of satisfaction proclaimed that he was too "crowded" to import any more. A small keg, on a low bench, now attracted his attention; he rolled it over, and the contents, molasses, gurgled out, of the bung-hole. Piggy applied his lips to the opening, and drank down the luscious contents with a deep-drawn sigh of satisfaction. It was the first time he had tasted this luxury; and he concluded that the world was henceforth to be an illimitable pig's trough. Having finished the keg of molasses, he looked round for something more solid by way of top-dressing, and soon disposed of a couple of bars of yellow soap which came in his way, but thought it rather tasteless. In a dark corner stood a jar of rum which Jacob had laid in for his winter consumption. Piggy rolled it about vigorously and the contents gushed out, the cork being loose. Expecting to find this fluid superior to the molasses, he eagerly caught the neck of the jar in his jaws and tilted it high. A single gulp was enough; he commenced coughing and sputtering in utter disgust, saying as plainly as a pig could say it, in deep contemptuous grunts, "what beastly stuff is this?—ugh, ugh, ugh—what a horrid smell—I never thought much

of these stupid men—but if they swallow that—ugh—ugh—ugh—" He rushed out to the brook and rinsed his mouth repeatedly, and ended by a deep draught of the clear stream. Returning to the cottage, he commenced an exploration of Rachel's bedroom, dragged off the quilt and blankets and lay down upon them on the floor. Finding this rather hard, he got into bed, and after a few efforts with his snout, managed to make an opening in the bed-ticking large enough for his fat person, and crept in among the feathers. Now, at length, he thought, "pigs are about to get their 'rights,' the world is not such a bad place after all, though there are butchers in it." Externally and internally, he had never before felt so comfortable.

The deep snores of piggy were proclaiming his bliss, when Jacob and Rachel approached the cottage after their unsuccessful fishing excursion. They were startled to find the door off the hinges; but when they entered and gazed in stupefied astonishment on the wreck before them—the rifed cellar, the empty keg and rum jar, the broken crockery, even Jacob was struck dumb, and forgot to swear. He naturally concluded that burglars had been at work, and could only moan out "I'm a ruined man." Suddenly his stupor was broken by a loud out-cry from Rachel in the bedroom, "Jekup, Jekup, here's the thief." He rushed in and seized piggy, who, being thus rudely disturbed in his paradise, opened his sleepy eyes, comprehended the situation at a glance, and with a few vigorous kicks and plunges, freed himself from his captors, upsetting Jacob violently on the floor, and bolted for the hills.

That night Jacob Tottles retired to a temporary couch on the floor, "a sadder and a wiser man." He pondered long over the events of the day, and began at length to have some dim perception of a moral order in the universe, which he had been violating, and had received, in consequence, just punishment. Into his dull, selfish soul there crept a conviction that all was not right with him, and that it was not a safe thing to fight against a Power that could, in a single day, inflict such penalties. When he awoke in the morning he said to his wife, "Ratch-el, I've made up my mind to swap that pig with farmer Dawe for one of his sheep—the devil's got into it. And mubbe," he added in a softer tone than usual, "ye'd best take a bit pork and some taties to that poor cripple, Teddy Ryan."

On the following Sunday, just as the parson was uttering the beautiful opening sentences of the morning service, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive," the church door opened, and to the unutterable astonishment of the congregation, Jacob Tottles was seen to enter, followed by Rachel, and quietly take his seat. Let us hope that he continues a regular church-goer, and that the Christmas of 1871 was a much happier day to him than that of the previous year.

H.

HARD ON THE CORONERS.—"In some respects," says Max Adeler, "Delaware is slightly ahead of any other State in the Union in the matter of coroners, for instance, she is so far in advance of her sister commonwealths that they must soon either select for this office men of loftier genius, or else abolish the system altogether from very shame and mortification. A week or two ago a gentleman who had been travelling in the old world, and who had collected a large number of curiosities, went down to Wilmington. He had with him a mummy which died and was embalmed during the very year Joseph was carried into Egypt. The coroner of Wilmington—as report says—heard of the mummy; and what does he do but empanel a jury of twelve men, and then march round to hold an inquest upon our old Egyptian friend! After deliberating for an hour and a half, and listening to the testimony of a doctor, who accused the corpse of having inside of him some complicated works with Latin names—all of which the mummy would undoubtedly repudiate had he been alive, the jury returned a verdict that 'deceased came to his death by the hands of a party or parties unknown.' This was sublime enough. But our coroner conceived a higher flight of genius. He charged the regular fee for his services, but dated the bill back to the time of the mummy's death, and then presented it to the traveller, with compound interest added to date. The amount was some four million times greater than the combined national debts of the United States and Great Britain. The bill was accompanied by a dray for the purpose of carrying home the cash. It has not yet been paid however."

Dr. Balmanno, a London surgeon, has successfully applied the magic lantern to the study of diseases of the skin. A transparent photograph of the skin is taken, and then placed in a magic lantern. A strong hydro-oxygen light casts the picture enlarged on a white sheet, and in this way the smallest details are brought out with astonishing minuteness.