

Away Back Home

A Christmas Story

On Thursday of every week in the three years since he had left home, Jim Ogdensby had written to his mother, and on the same day he had received a letter from her. In all that time he had never once mentioned his father, though he had often thought of him. But Mother had always made a mention of Dad. It had always been the same until today, "Dad is well". This time it read, "Dad is brooding over something, Jim, and he won't tell me what it is. He says he feels all right, but he is very quiet, and doesn't seem to hear what we say to him sometimes. Seems to like to sit and brood. I'm a afraid for him, Jim."

He slipped the letter into his pocket, turned off the light at his desk, and sat in the semi-darkness of the office of the financial institution where he was beginning to make his mark.

The windows of the room over looked one of the main streets of the city. The street lamps, and the thousands of lights from windows and advertising signs, lit up the thoroughfare. Hurrying throngs, growing larger with every minute, were sweeping by; it was nearing the hour when most of the city's industries would close for the day.

The crowds, the bustle, the noise, and the lights combined in the making of a spectacle that had always fascinated and appalled him since he had left home, determined that the city should give him place and wealth. He was wrestling both from it as others, country born and bred, had done before him. But he had never softened toward it, never taken it to his heart. To him it always seemed so callously indifferent, so imperiously proud, so certain in the end to crush out of those who pressed to love it most all that was best and noblest.

"Some day he would go back again to the country, to the open that called to him, to the woods he knew, to the fields, to the smell of good earth and the feel of it beneath the feet, to everything that had made life worth living. What did they know, who dwelt in the cities, of the "life" that they talked so much about?

Yes, some day he would go back, but not to the house where he was born,

the home he had loved and often longed for. He pictured the restful orchard, the silvery river where he had learned to swim, mother's flower garden, the big barn yard, the little sisters who had wept so bitterly when he had said goodbye. He would see them too, some day, but he would not go back there until his father would say that he had been in the wrong, that he was sorry he lost his temper and struck him—almost a man grown—for taking the "fliver" to the school picnic, without asking permission to do so. Dad must write and say that he was sorry, or ask Mother to say it for him, or else—he drew back his head with a sudden jerk. Or else what? Did he mean, he asked himself, that he would not go back until Dad did? And he loved Dad, too. There was no doubt in his mind on that point when he tried to analyze his feelings. But he could not forget that blow. There must be an understanding about that.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts. He switched on the lights, calling out "Come in," as he did so. There entered Miss Bettie Dalton, dainty, brownhaired, brown-eyed, who was stenographer to himself and Charlie Morrison, another rising employee.

"Mr. Ogdensby," she began, somewhat diffidently, "It's just two weeks to Christmas and I would like to spend a few days around that time at my home. Mr. Morrison is willing that I should have a few days, if you are."

"Certainly, certainly," he said, "make whatever arrangements you choose. Guess we'll manage to get along for a few days." Some impulse moved him to ask: "Is your home in the country?" "Yes," she said, "near Ogdensby."

He started and stammered, "Then I ought to know you; that place was—it was named after my folks. I don't remember anyone of your name around there."

"No," she answered, hesitatingly. "My real name is Bettie Dalton Hamilton. I've always taken my Auntie's name—Dalton—in the city. I live with her here, and she's very good to me."

"Then I do know you—or at least your family well," Ogdensby said. "Why you used to play with my sisters. You were a tiny little tot then."

"Yes," she smiled at him. "I remember you well; when I was in the junior class at school, you were passing out

I remember an old copy book of yours I found after you left school. It had some verses in it that you had copied; one of them always appealed to me."

"What was it?" he asked. "I'll type it out tomorrow, if you don't mind," she said quietly, "and now if you have no more letters, may I go?"

"Yes—oh of course—yes—yes," he stammered, rising awkwardly and opening the door for her.

The next morning he found on his desk the typewritten verse she had promised him. He grinned as he took it up, furtively, with the thought that it might be from some love song or ballad. Then he read it, once, and again, and a flood tide of sweet memories swept his very soul. In intervals of leisure during the rest of the day he said that verse to himself, softly and lingeringly.

"The city streets are fair and bright, The city folks are gay; Their hearts to joy attuned are Upon this Christmas Day; But far beyond the city streets In fancy do I roam, Across the fields and down the lane, That leads away back to home."

That afternoon he wrote a long letter to Dad. It was an outpouring of heart, frank, natural, full of the things a father might want to know, of what his boy was doing, and he wound it up with the declaration that he would be home for Christmas, and in the spring would come back to stay on the farm, as they had planned it together in the happy days, if Dad would have him.

The next morning there was a letter from Dad, the first he had received since he had left home. It had crossed his own. It was a short affectionate appeal to Jim to spend Christmas at home, to forgive a hasty decision and a hasty blow. "Mother is worrying about me now, Jim," it went on "because I'm worrying about you. And that's all that's the matter with me, lad, truly. Bodily I'm fit, but oh! Jim—life is short at the best."

There was song in Jim Ogdensby's heart that day and for many a day thereafter. It was almost loud enough for others to hear, a day or two before Christmas, when he boarded a train for the tedious day's journey that would take him home.

Miss Bettie Hamilton was a passenger, too, and her brightness and friend-

liness added more stanzas to the song of his heart. The journey that had promised to be wearisome was, after all, a rather jolly one. Jim made certain, in a man's clumsy way, that Bettie would rather live in the country than in the city, and that she was still fancy free. And looking at his stalwart figure and frank face, Bettie was sure that he would be a fine partner to travel with along the broad highway of life.

The whole Ogdensby family was at the station to meet Jim. He kissed them all—Dad included—without embarrassment or shame. Mother wept a little after they reached home, but her tears were not of sorrow. Dad said little but there was a wonderful light in his eyes, a glow on his face, and deep emotion in his voice when, as they parted at Jim's bedroom door, he uttered the familiar benediction, "Good night, lad and God bless you."

Before Jim was up in the morning, his mother slipped into his room and sat on the bed as she used to do when he was a youngster. She talked of many things, and finally asked in a casual way about Bettie Hamilton and her work.

Then Jim told the story of the verse the girl had written out for him. His mother listened without comment, but as she went downstairs she said to herself: "He's in love with her already. I wonder what he'll say when she tells him some day how she and his own mother arranged that he should see that verse?"

CHOICE RECIPES

APPLE TAFFY—Put a pound of sugar into an enameled saucepan with two teaspoonsful of vinegar and a half cupful of apple juice. Boil the mass until it forms a firm ball when tried in cold water. Then pour it into a buttered pan, cool slightly and pull. Cut in convenient pieces with shears and place the candy on a very lightly buttered plate.

OLD-FASHIONED FRUIT CANDY—Remove the stones from a half cupful each of prunes and dates, seed a half cupful of raisins and put all through the food-chopper with a quarter-cupful of figs. Add a quarter-teaspoonful each of nutmeg, cloves, mix well, then roll into quarter-inch and cut into inch lengths. Roll in wax papers. This is easy to make and is a wholesome sweet.

WHIPPED CREAM PIE—Line a pie plate with a rich crust and bake quickly in a hot oven. When done, spread plate with a rich crust and bake quickly in a hot oven. When done, spread with a thin layer of jelly or jam, then whip one cupful of thick sweet cream until it is as light as possible, sweeten with powdered sugar and flavor with vanilla; spread over the jelly or jam. Set the cream where it will get very cold before whipping.

ENGLISH PLUM PUDDING—Three eggs, 3 cups flour, 1 cup chopped suet, one half cup candied lemon, 1 cup molasses, 1 cup sweet milk, 1 teaspoon of soda, 1 teaspoon salt, one-half cup citron, one third teaspoon spices, a little nutmeg, 1 cup of raisins, 2 even teas-

poons of cream of tartar, 1 cup currants, 1 cup brown sugar. Steam four hours.

CHRISTMAS PUDDING—One cup of finely chopped suet, 1 cup seeded raisins, 1 egg, 1 cup flour, 1 cup sugar, 1 cup currants, 1 cup molasses, 1 even teaspoon salt, 1 even teaspoon soda, cinnamon and allspice to season. Prepare the day before the pudding is cooked. Wash the currants and pick over carefully; then put them wet into a cooking bowl to stand over night, and all the other ingredients excepting the flour and soda; beat well. The next morning add the flour and the soda, and beat, and stir together again; put in the pudding basin or mold, and steam four hours. The water must boil in the steamer kettle, and be kept boiling until the pudding is taken up. Hot water from the tea-kettle can be added as needed.

As a person grows older he learns many things that would have been some use to him when younger.

WINTER LAND

Although I did not leave my home Nor pass a doorway through, Last night I journeyed from one land Into another new.

The land I left was gray and brown, The leaves were dancing round, At play with little childish winds Upon the garden ground.

The land I saw when morning came And called me from my sleep Had not a bush or tree I knew, Nowhere the leaves lay deep.

I left the brown, gray autumn land Where leaves danced to and fro, And journeyed to the winter land, For last night came the snow!

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Seven lean, gray warships sailed from Devonport, England, last month, on a tour of the Empire which is to occupy ten months. Until next June none of the British seamen who make up the crews of the warships will set foot on any but British soil.

The ships comprise the "Hood" and the "Repulse", the latest word in British warships, the acme of scientific ship construction and naval wisdom. The "Hood" was a famous "mystery ship" during the later days of the war, and in her design are incorporated the lessons of the battle of Jutland, and the other naval battles of the Great War. The other five ships are light cruisers of the finest type. Two of them, the "Dragon" and the "Dauntless", escorted the "Renown" when the Prince of Wales travelled to Canada in 1919.

The ships will visit the western, southern and eastern coasts of Africa, India, Singapore, and the coasts of Australia, by the delegates to the Imperial Con-

ference, made up of representatives of all parts of the Empire. The tour will emphasize the solidarity of the Empire, will bring to the world's eye the superiority of British shipbuilders and engineers, trade will be stimulated by the exhibition of Britain's power to maintain peace and justice and it will add to the prestige of the British flag in every corner of the world, no matter how remote.

As the ships sailed on their outward-bound journey, an observer wrote that, "if any foreign navy during the past hundred years had been strong enough to defeat the British navy, the British overseas Dominions would have laid at the mercy of that superior fleet."

As it is the heritage of King Alfred and Queen Elizabeth moves on to greater glory in this new era of Empire history.

Shades of Drake and Nelson! How British hearts will swell, the world over, at the thought of that Peace Armada making its proud tour of the world-wide Dominions.

Just before the vessels sailed on their tour they took part in that extraordinary review of the entire British Fleet in Singapore, when the coasts of Australia, by the delegates to the Imperial Con-

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