"Come in!" said the giant, and Stephen walked in slowly and fearfully, bowing as he came to the several personages in the room.

"Are those my worms?" said the mackerel. "If so, put them in my mouth, one at a time. There! not so fast. They are frozen, sure enough; but do you know that I believe I like them this way the best. I never tasted frozen ones before."

By this time the dwarf had mounted the table, and opening the schedule, stood pointing to an agreement written at the bottom of it, while the fairy had a pen, already dipped in the ink, which she held in her hand as she stood on the other side of the schedule.

"Now, sir!" said the giant, "just take your seat in your chair, take that pen in your hand, and sign your name below that agreement. If you've been listening at the door all this time, as I believe you have, you have heard the contents of the schedule and therefore need not read it over."

Stephen thought no more of disobeying than he did of challenging the giant to a battle, and he therefore seated himself in his chair, and taking the pen from the fairy, wrote his name at the bottom of the agreement, although he knew that by that act he was signing away half his wealth. When he had written his signature he laid down the pen and looked around to see if anything more was required of him; but just at that moment something seemed to give way in the back of his neck, his head fell forward, so as to nearly strike the table, and he awoke!

There was no longer a schedule, a fairy, a dwarf, or a giant. In front of him was the mackerel, split open and lying on its back.

It was all a dream!

For an hour Stephen Skarridge sat at his table, his face buried in his hands. When, at last, his candle gave signs of spluttering out, he arose, and, with a subdued and quiet air, he went to bed.

WHAT MUST OCCUR.

The next morning was bright, cold, and cheering, and Stephen Skarridge arose very early, went down to the large front room where his treasures were kept, got out his check-book, and for two hours was busily employed in writing. When the old woman who attended to his household affairs arrived at the usual hour she was surprised at his orders to cook for his breakfast the whole of a mackerel which he handed her. When he had finished his meal, at which he ate at least one-half of the fish, he called her up into his room. He then addressed her as follows:—

"Margaret, you have been my servant for seventeen years. During that time I have paid you fifty cents per week for your services. I am now convinced that the sum was insufficient; you should have had at least two dollars—considering you only had one meal in the house. As you would probably have spent the money as fast as I gave it to you, I shall pay you no interest upon what I have withheld, but here is a check for the unpaid balance—one thousand three hundred and twenty-six dollars. Invest it carefully and you will find it quite a help to you." Handing the paper to the astounded woman he took up a large wallet, stuffed with checks, and left the house.

He went down into the lower part of the town, with a countenance full of lively fervor and generous light. When he reached the quarter where

SKARRIDGE AS A BENEFACTOR.

his property lay he spent an hour or two in converse with his tenants, and when he had spoken with the last one, his wallet was nearly empty, and he was followed by a wildly joyful crowd, who would have brought a chair and carried him in triumph through the town had he not calmly waved them back.

When the concourse of grateful ones had left him he repaired to the house of Philip Weaver, the butcher, and hired his pony and spring-cart. Then he went to Ambrose Smith, the baker (at whose shop he had stopped on his way down town), and inquired if his orders had been filled. Although it was Christmas morning, Ambrose and his seven assistants were all as busy as bees, but they had not yet been able to fill said orders. In an hour, however, Ambrose came himself to a candy-store, where Stephen was treating a crowd of delighted children, and told him all was ready and the cart loaded. At this, Stephen hurried to the baker's shop, mounted the cart, took the reins and drove rapidly in the direction of the cottage of Arthur Tyrrell. When he reached the place it was nearly one o'clock.

Driving cautiously, as he neared the house, he stopped a little distance from it and tied the horse to a tree. Then he stealthily approached a window and looked in.

Arthur Tyrrell sat upon a chair, in the middle of the room, his arms folded and his head bowed upon his breast. On a stool by his left side sat his wife, her tearful eyes raised to his sombre countenance. Before her father stood the little girl, leaning upon his knees and watching the varied expressions that flashed across his face. By his father's right side, his arm resting upon his parent's shoulder, stood the boy, a look of calm resignation far beyond his years lighting up his intelligent face.

'Twas a tableau never to be forgotten!

Able to gaze upon it but a few minutes, Stephen Skarridge pushed open the door and entered the room. His entrance was the signal of consternation. The wife and children fled to the farthest corner of the room, while Arthur Tyrrell arose and sternly confronted the intruder.

"Ha!" said he. "You have soon returned. You think that we can be yet further despoiled. Proceed, take all we have. There is yet this," and he pointed to the two cents' worth of lard, which still lay upon the table.

"No, no," faltered Stephen Skarridge, seizing the hand of Arthur Tyrrell and warmly pressing it. "Keep it! Keep it! 'Tis not for that I came, but to ask your pardon and to beg your acceptance of a Christmas gift. Pardon for having increased the weight of your poverty, and a gift to celebrate the advent of a happier feeling between us."

Having said this, Stephen paused for a reply. Arthur Tyrrell mused for a moment; then he cast his eyes upon his wife and his children, and, in a low but firm voice, he said:—

"I pardon and accept!"

"That's right!" cried Skarridge, his whole being animated by a novel delight; "come out to the cart, you and your son, and help me bring in the things, while Mrs. T. and the girl set the table as quickly as possible." The cart was now brought up before the door, and it was rapidly unloaded by willing hands. From under a half-dozen new blankets, which served to keep the other contents from contact with the frosty air, Stephen first handed out a fine linen table-cloth, and then a basket containing a dinner-set of queensware (third class—seventy-eight pieces, *with* soup-tureen and pickle-dishes) and a half-dozen knives and forks (rubber-handled and warranted to stand hot water). When the cloth had been spread and the plates and dishes arranged, Arthur Tyrrell and his son, aided now by the wife and daughter, brought in the remaining contents of the cart and placed them on the table, while, with a bundle of kindling which he had brought and the fallen limbs which lay all about the cottage, Skarridge made a rousing fire on the hearth.

When the cart was empty and the table fully spread, it presented indeed a noble sight! At one end a great turkey; at the other a pair of geese; a duck upon one side and a pigeon pie upon the other; cranberries, potatoes, white and sweet; onions, parsnips, celery, bread, butter, beets (pickled and buttered), pickled cucumbers and walnuts, and several kinds of sauces, made up the first course; while upon a side-table stood mince-pies, apple-pies, pumpkin-pies, apples, nuts, almonds, raisins, and a huge pitcher of cider, for dessert.

It was impossible for the Tyrrell family to

GRAND FINAL TABLEAU.

gaze unmoved upon this bounteously spread table, and after silently clasping each other for a moment they sat down with joyful, thankful hearts, to a meal far better than they had seen for years. At their earnest solicitation Mr. Skarridge joined them.

When the meal was over and there was little left but empty dishes, they all arose, and Skarridge prepared to take his leave.

"But before I go," said he, "I would leave with you a further memento of my good feeling and friendship. You know my Hillsdale farm in the next township?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Arthur Tyrrell; "is it possible that you will give me a position there?"

"I make you a present of the whole farm," said Skarridge. "There are two hundred and forty-two acres, sixty of which are in timber; large mansion-house, two good barns, and cow and chicken houses; a well, covered in; an orchard of young fruit trees, and a stream of water flowing through the place. The estate is well stocked with blooded cattle, horses, etc., and all necessary farming utensils. Possession immediate."

Without waiting for the dumbfounded Tyrrell to speak, Skarridge turned quickly to his wife and said: "Here, madam, is my Christmas gift to you. In this package you will find shares of the New York Central and Hudson (sixes, of 'eighty-three), of the Fort Wayne (guaranteed), and of the St. Paul's (preferred); also bonds of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western (second mortgage), and of the Michigan Seven Per Cent. War Loan. In all these amount to nine thousand and eighty-two dollars; but to preclude the necessity of selling at a sacrifice, for immediate wants, I have taken the liberty of placing in the package one thousand dollars in greenbacks. And now, dear friends, adieu!"

But the grateful family could not allow this noble man to leave them thus. Arthur Tyrrell seized his hand and pressed it to his bosom, and then, as if overcome with emotion, Mrs. Tyrrell fell upon her benefactor's neck, while the children gratefully grasped the skirts of his coat. With one arm around the neck of the still young, once beautiful, and now fast improving Mrs. Tyrrell, Stephen Skarridge stood for a few minutes, haunted by memories of the past. Then he spoke:—

"Once," said he, his voice trembling the while, "once—I, too—loved such a one. But it is all over now—and the grass waves over her grave. Farewell, farewell, dear friends!" and dashing away a tear he tore himself from the fervent family and swiftly left the house.

Springing into the cart he drove rapidly into the town—a happy man!

. . . . . .

Did you ever read a story like that before?

The church bells are ringing,
The children are singing,
The season is bringing
Its welcome of cheer;
No more there is sighing,
Each sorrow is dying,
And glad hearts are crying
That Christmas is here.