

A CHRISTMAS FIRE-SIDE TALE.

HOW THE PREDICTIONS OF A LOCAL PROPHETESS TURNED OUT CORRECT. A PACK OF CARDS THE MEDIUM.

By H. F. SHORTIS.

I cannot too often repeat that I am proud of the deeds of my countrymen in the days gone by. Their adventures, on sea and land, will one day be told by the historian. Although hidden for years, eye for centuries the deeds of noble people are bound sooner or later and through unexpected means, to come to the surface, when the torchlight of historical analysis will be dashed upon them, and they will be assigned to that place to which they legitimately belong, in the glorious sacrifices which have been willingly made to build up that Empire of which we are all so proud to call ourselves sons. From time immemorial, from the early dawn of history, and the historian exalting the deeds and exploits of the heroes and characters of the nation whereof he is a citizen, it should not therefore be surprising that the nation should be proud of its past when we express a reasonable pride in the triumphs and achievements of our countrymen. This is patriotism. This is what ancient Greece and Rome to which high pitch of civilization, which named for them, alternately, the great title of "Mistress of the World," drew from their sons, whether as statesmen, orators, poets, or scholars was jealously treasured up

and when the opportune time arrived was told with the burning eloquence of a Demosthenes or a Cicero, or handed down to posterity in the well-rounded periods and sonorous sentences of Herodotus, or the more gentle, but equally fascinating Livy, who tells the story of his country and the deeds of her sons in a spirit of patriotism, which has given to posterity a graphic record of the proud race from which they sprung, and sheds a halo of immortality over the seven-hilled city by the banks of the ancient Tiber.

XMAS REMINISCENCES.

But as the cycle of old Father Time has run its course, and the season has arrived when old and young have assembled round the comfortable and happy fireside (even as we used to do in the days of yore, over the old-fashioned obsolete dog-irons and open grate) during the Christmas Festival, it is customary to relate the stories of the past in which our countrymen played the most important and interesting part. In the old days, when I was a boy, one of the party, noted as an elocutionist, was selected to read for the benefit of all concerned such instructive and interesting literature as the "Scottish Chiefs," the "Children of the Abbey," "Waverley

Novels," "Don Quixote" by Cervantes, and other books, which were not alone highly appreciated, but were also most instructive. The stories as the fireside would generally be illumined by the introduction of a ghost, fortune-teller, pirate, buried treasure (where the nigger appeared just as the pick struck the iron chest)—tales of the ice-foes and Labrador, etc. The most of the stories smacked of the sensational, combined with the romantic, with a shake of the mystic thrown in as a favoring. My story will have the fortune-teller as the principal character in the cast, and it can be relied on as being strictly correct, as I have received it from an old friend, whose veracity cannot be questioned.

THE GLORIOUS FIRST OF MARCH.

In 1888 my friend sailed to the ice-foes in the good ship *Abasco*, owned and commanded by Captain Sam and Jonathan Spracklin of Cupids. The first of March was a day to be remembered by the boys of 60 years ago. Well, on that date, the "*Abasco*," a square-rigged brigantine, with square foresail—foretoppail, topgallant sail and royal; fore and aft mainmast, main-topmast, top-gallant sail and main royal—main, middle, main topgallant stay-sail, fore-staysail, big and flying jib. She was considered by her owners and crew the "daisy of the fleet," especially for sheet or pan ice, to pass over four weeks buffeting with head winds, "snow-storms and the frozen pans. In the early days of April and the "ragged jackets," and up to the 8th (Spy Wednesday) they had secured a saving trip. On that date a most terrific storm of wind and rain set in, and it will never be forgotten by those who experienced it.

As well as the friends of those who were rescued, as happened to five boats' crews (30 men) of the brigantine "*Deerhound*," owned and commanded by Captain John Bartlett of Brigue—famously known as "Honest John," who represented his native district in the House of Assembly, in his later days. Capt. John's crew was always acknowledged to be the pick of the Bay. My friend had two brothers returned safely, but the other will only come back when the sea gives up its dead.

BAROMETER UPSET.

But to return to the good ship *Abasco*. On April 8th, the morning opened up beautifully, with a clear blue sky, and continued so up to 11 o'clock. Young seals were plentiful on the ice around the ship, and the crew were wondering why the order for "all hands overboard" was not given. The ice was rather loose to do much without boats, and rather too tight to do much with them; but by noon they learned that the "glass was bottom up," so to speak—and soon the storm of wind and snow burst upon them, with the wind about South East, and by midnight it was blowing a regular hurricane from the North West, and continued for many days. After two weeks laying to and reaching, with the gale right off the land, blowing about West North West, all hands were agreeably surprised, when almost suddenly they found themselves in warm water. The vessel which was carrying a burden of ice, shook off her "white mass," and rose to the seas like a duck. The wind moderated, but the seas ran high, but they took on board about 200 seal-pelts, which had been fastened to the heavy tow-line, and thrown overboard, with one end fastened to the foremast. The oil from the pelts not only calmed the troubled waters, but helped to keep the ship up to the seas when lying to. I must pass over many incidents which would be of interest to the uninitiated, but my narrative is becoming too lengthy. Finally they got a light breeze from the South East, and after running for 24 hours, the navigator, Capt. Sam Spracklin, got soundings, and informed all hands they were South East of the Virgin Rocks. He then gave the helmsman the course, and with a fair breeze and every inch of canvas set—studying sails included—they finally sighted Cape Broyle. Head on the port bow, and in due course dropped anchor in the historic harbor of St. John's—on the 15th of May. After landing their fat, and being paid off (less 30 cents per "shot hole") which was the custom in those days of "take what is given, you and be thankful," they decided to enjoy themselves and view the sights of St. John's.

JACK ASHORE.

After being fairly successful at the ice-foes they felt like dividing their good luck with their "tenderfoot" brethren—the landsmen, and take a sip with them from the cup that cheers, also to purchase something to bring home to the "girls they left behind them." It has always been a puzzle to my friend, and this is the crux of the story, how events turned out as foretold. He is not, or not quite, a "superstitious" man, but has often been looked on by his intimates as a "doubting Thomas." But let the result speak for itself, and let the thousands of the readers of the Telegram put their own construction on it—attribute it to whatever source they please, but the fact remains, clear and irrefutable: And now I will give events as they happened. One of the crew of the "*Abasco*," James Richards by name, of Claspers Beach, had \$20 (or five pounds as it was then) in cash stolen from his chest. After talking matters over with a few chosen comrades, one dry old-timer remarked, "Don't cry like you'll find out who took your money—go right away up to Mother F— (as she was called)." He said "go where? You might just as well go to Davey Jones' locker, as to go to Mother F—."

What does she know about taking old Joe's advice? They went there, Richards, Hussey and my old friend. The fortune-teller lived at that time somewhere in the neighborhood of Carter's Hill. Richards said he wanted her to tell him his "fortune." The three were invited to take a seat, and she produced the cards—the same kind of cards that we play in our National Game of Forty-Fives—which has been corrupted into Auction Forty-Fives or some other outlandish innovation. Well, she shuffled the cards, and Richards cut them, and she studied them closely, and after telling him the usual prophecy of the dark haired and light haired girl, and the one he would marry, and the one he would not, which was of no interest to any of them, as they were there to know "who stole the money."

MODERN WITCH OF ENBOR.

After Richards had cut the cards several times, she said, "You have lost some money!" Richards denied it. She had arranged that before they visited her; but she persisted in telling him he had, and that it was one of his shipmates who had stolen his money, and gave a description of the thief. Hussey then had his fortune told—but there was nothing of any importance revealed, either of his past, present or future career, except the girl with the light or dark hair.

(Strange, while I think of it, I never heard one of the mystics speak about a girl with a red head. She'd be light-headed—Editor.) Then came my friend's turn, who looked upon it all as a huge joke. However, he cut the cards, like the other two, and to a great deal she told, my friend paid no attention. Then she studied the cards more closely after he had again cut them, and assuming a solemn and serious tone she told him "there was trouble in his family"—she explained it as "small sick beds." My friend laughed at her and said, "Woman, I have no family." She gave him the cards to cut again. After looking through them very carefully, she turned her eyes straight towards his face, and said: "there is, and there is serious trouble in your family." Continuing she said, "It looks here as if they were out in a large boat or craft, and then went out in smaller ones, and there is great trouble—some got back to the latter craft, but some of them never got back, and there is great trouble." She shuffled the cards a third time, and he cut them again. She then told him that he would make a long voyage very shortly across the water, and that he would meet with a wreck, but it would be no loss to him, and that he would see all the way in the vessel in which he first set out, but would go the last of the voyage in a smaller boat or craft, and it was while in the small craft that he would meet with the wreck.

FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECY.

Now for the proof of Mother F's prophecy. My friend arrived home at Salmon Cove about the latter part of May, and found his brothers children down with the measles (Prophecy No. 1 proved). There was no news reached his home, in fact, any part of the country, about the loss of any of the crew of the "*Deerhound*," up to that time, but a few days later—the arrival of one of the fleet brought the sad intelligence of having seen the "*Deerhound*," flying the British Ensign at half-mast. The next report was that Capt. Bartlett had lost 20 men, and this last report was confirmed a few days after on the return of the "*Deerhound*." My friend had two brothers on her when she sailed with flags flying, guns firing and crew cheering on the 1st of March, but sad to relate only one brother returned to tell the tale of the great disaster. (Prophecy No. 2 correct). Now for the last point in Mother F's predictions. My friend sailed from Cupids in a fore-and-aft schooner about June 1st, bound to Horse Tickle, Stag Bay, Northern Labrador, and reached Grady in due course. There my friend and two other young men of the crew "discarded" and took charge of their own "bully-boat"—a three-sail boat, about 20 feet keel. After performing some repairs—they launched her, bent sails, ballasted and provisioned her, and with the rest of the fleet, set sail for Stag Bay, and the first run was from Grady to Cut-Throat, having to harbor there owing to Arctic ice. It was now well up in June. Having spent the night at Cut-Throat, they left the next morning early. The leader was a Captain David Dixon, of Indian Harbor, Guysborough, Nova Scotia, owner and commander of the fast sailing clipper "*Sherbrook*." Dixon was bound on a trading voyage to the far North among the Esquimaux for furs, and his vessel was full to the hatches with all kinds of tempting goods—all kinds of groceries of the most delicious and appetizing selection. Hams and fitches of bacon, cheese, raisins, currants, and everything from a "needle to an anchor." Dixon and the boat and crew left Cut-Throat in early morning, and about noon they had to harbor at the Black Brook, a short distance South of Cape Harrison—the ice being close to the Cape. Black Brook is only a light, and Dixon had to anchor in the Gut. Those in the small boat could go in the Brook, which widened into a lake, consequently they were safe from being crushed, or thrown up on the rocks by the Arctic floe, which came in that evening with an easterly wind, and put the good ship "*Sherbrook*" up on a sunken rock, and broke a hole in her bottom, and she nearly filled with water, but the pumps could keep the water down, while with the assistance of a shore boat's crew, the cargo was landed in fairly good condition. The shore boat's crew made no charges for services rendered, but Capt. Dixon was not the man to allow a good Samaritan to go unrewarded, so he filled the little craft to almost overflowing, and on the third day, when the wind changed and the ice began to move off, they were about the first of the fleet to round Cape Harrison, and shape their course for Horse Tickle, Stag Bay, with their treasure throves.

UP TO THE PSYCHISTS.

And now I ask can Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Conan Doyle, including their medium, beat all the prophecies of Mother F—? But I forgot—these spiritists only deal with the other world—to my mind quite unnecessary, because, if they will only have patience for a decade or so, they will know all about it, without the assistance of a medium, and let us hope they will be provided with a fairly comfortable corner, where they can correspond from the other end with the poor struggling mortals on this sublimity sphere. But as it is to-day, I am compelled to have more faith in Mother F's art of prediction with the pack of cards, well shuffled, than I

have in all the mediums, table-rapping, crystal-gazing, outja boards and all the other mystic arrangements, which are playing upon the minds of the poor deluded mortals, who attend their seances on both sides of the Atlantic, and are hypnotized into the belief that they are in correspondence with some departed friend—who is probably enjoying their antics to compare with him, but would prefer to be left alone to enjoy the peace and happiness of his new abode. I prefer Mother F. She at least told what was about to happen, and it turned out correct in every particular. I trust this true story will enable the readers of the Evening Telegram to pass a pleasant hour or so during the Christmas Festival Season, and I wish them one and all a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Christmas Does Not Stand Alone.

If Christmas stood alone it would be an idle mockery. But it does not stand alone. It is part of a year. Yet it is a peculiar part. It is that brief period in which the child rules the world. It marks nowadays the culmination of a civilization which has had a leading principle. The selfish, the hard, the grasping and the unsparring are out and apart that one week from the great flowing tide of the development of the world's progress. The man or woman who does not know this or see it or feel it is alien to the Christian spirit and to all the products wrought by the Christ spirit in the twenty centuries last past.

Christmas day, then, brings a message. But it also sings a song of hope and calls aloud a prophecy. The message is that gentleness is far stronger than force and that the greatest power on earth is the compelling power of tenderness. Every Christmas tree is lit with that light. The great flood of presents bear this as its message. The cheer and charity of the whole reason are fed by this love. If the result of this process is only a century flower, however, or one that blooms even only once a year, then of what use is this more than that,



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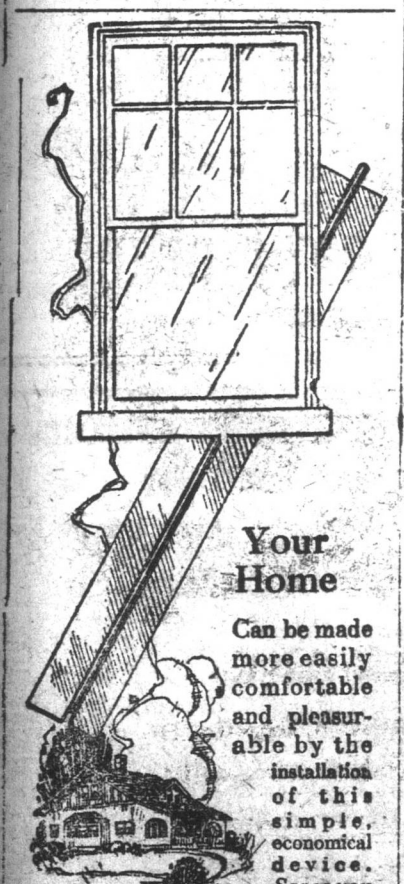
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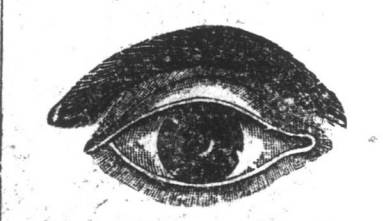


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