self for joy in the darkness. "Instead of reading one of Harry's letters, you have read Norah's letter to me, accepting my proposal of marriage. I suppose I must tell you now though the engagement will not be made public until the New Year. In the excess of my joy"—here he heard the girl beside him give a little convulsive laugh—"in the excess of my joy," he went on, I showed the letter to Harry, and he, the careless hare-brained idiot, tucked it in his coat pocket, as though it were his tailor's bill, and—"

"I shan't have you talking so of him when he is not here to defend himself," Evelyn began, softly. "It—it is enough that I have misjudged him. Do you suppose he can ever forgive me? You see, I could not think of asking him," earnestly.

"Hark!" Sandringham held up his hand. All the bells in the city were ringing in the first hour of Christmas, and out in the balltoom the music had ceased, while from the supper room came peals of merry laughter.

"A Merry Christmas! A Merry Christmas!" fifty voices shouted at once.

Sandringham unfastened his helmet, and, with a fervent "Thank Heaven!" placed it on the floor beside him.

"Evelyn, my dear," he asked, gravely, "how long have you seen through my disguise?"

"Only a very little while, Harry," demurely.

"Are you ready, then, to answer my question of yeste-day?"

"Yes, yes," quickly.

"It is 'always' now?"

"Always and to ever, dear."

"A Merry Christmas!" shouted a voice in front of them, and the curtains were drawn back suddenly. Beau Brummel and the Dresden Shepherdess bowed gaily to the Black Prince and the blushing Queen, and the music striking up, they all joined the dance once more.

Christmas Day in Other Lands.

Queer Customs of Inhabitants Across the Seas.

CHRISTMAS DAY, as the reputed anniversary of the birth of Jesus is one of the greatest festivals of the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Greek Churches. Its celebration is accordingly widespread. Throughout Christendom it is essentially a day of thanksgiving and rejoicing—a day of good cheer, and it is in Merrie Old England, that such a celebration would naturally take deepest root.

Strange it is that although the day is a Christian anniversary its customs have originated in Pagan rites. The holly and the mistletoe, which are the distinctively English Yule-tide decorations, are a survival of ancient Druidical worship. The Christmas carol is but a Saturnalian hymn rejuvenated. The Christmas banquet, which is common in England, is a reminiscence of the feasts given in honor of ancient gods and goddesses.

Christmas day in England is now somewhat shorn of its former grandeur, still the holiday is the one which is most generally participated in by all classes of English society. Partaking of a religious character, the forenoon of the day is usually passed in church, and in the evening the re-united members of the family assemble round the Christmas board. There is always an effort to bring absent members of the family home for the day. Among the especial customs of the day may be mentioned the Christmas carols, which are sung by traveling bands of choristers on Christmas eve and on Christmas morning. They are common in Devonshire, where the custom is for the singers to pool the money they make and expend it in a special merrymaking on Twelfth Night—a fortnight afterwards.

Then there is the good old Christmas tree custom, which has in England attained its perfect glory, although the custom existed in Germany for centuries previous to its introduction to Britain, and was in fact only introduced after the marriage of Queen Victoria to a German prince. Now a Christmas tree is set up in the great hall of an English country squire's house. At nightfall on Christmas eve the children, marshalled by the vicar and the village schoolmasters, make their way thither, the tree being meanwhile hidden in the bay windows. A magic lantern performance of which the squire is the director, proceeds. After the last view, the curtain is drawn and the tree comes to view, often most elaborate in its construction and fantastic schemes. The Christmas gift distribution of England is proverbial.

THE DAY IN PARIS.

Christmas eve is a fete in Paris and the Grand Boulevard possesses a character distinctive of the occasion. Late in the evening the cafes become crowded and the cafe restaurants that are to keep open all night for the Christmas reveillon begin to arrange their tables, many of which have been engaged in advance. The reveillon, or Christmas eve supper, at midnight, is more important to the Frenchman than the Christmas dinner, and the indulgence in it may account for the general atmosphere of almost gloomy abstinence that seems to hang over Paris on a Christmas day. Anyone interested in statistics may like to know that half a million dozen oysters were sold at the Halles on Christmas eve in 1896, and of ecrivisse, a species of crawfish, 60,000 were consumed during reveillon. Impecunious clerks and reckless Latin Quarter students go dinnerless for weeks that they may partake of a proper reveillon in a restaurant that is usually closed to them by bars of gold. The thoroughly up-to-date Parisian divides his Christmas supper into many courses, taking each at a different place, and perhaps reaching home for the last cup of coffee, served in place of the "petit dejeuner."

RUSSIAN CUSTOMS.

In the rural life of Russia Christmas eve is an important event. At sunset young and old assemble in the principal street of the village, and forming in a procession, visit the houses of the resident nobleman, the Mayor, and other village dignitaries, where they sing carols and receive coppers in return. A masquerade follows, in which the adults transform themselves into imitation cows, pigs, goats and other animals, in remembrance of the nativity of the manger. As soon as the evening stars appear above the horizon, a colatzia, or supper, is served. The feast begins by dividing the blessed wafer, a small portion of which is given to each person present. This is a sacred rite, in which none dare refuse to participate. After the supper the peasants return to the nobleman's house, where a Christmas tree has been prepared for them. If the nobleman has any young children, they will distribute small coins among the peasant guests.

IN THE NORTH LAND.

In no land is Christmas more generally observed than in Scandinavia. Peace and good-will are especially emphasized and old feuds are adjusted. A pretty symbol of the spirit that reigns is the practice of placing in a row every pair of shoes in each household, typifying that during the year the family will live together in peace and harmony. Scandinavia is especially the land of the Yule log, of Christmas stories and legends of Thor and Odin. Then is the time for skating, sledging, dancing, and a general frolic. It is customary for every member of the family to take a bath on the afternoon preceding Christmas, and oftentimes this is in all seriousness an annual affair. When the eve comes the Bible is read in nearly every household and family service is held. In many villages candles are left burning in the windows all night to give light to Kristine, who brings the gifts. It is also the custom to set a cake of meal out in the snow as a Christmas offering. A sheaf of wheat is placed on a pole in front of each house, to provide the birds with food. On Christmas evening there are the usual games which are generally interrupted by various bands of boys, who journey from hearth to hearth, singing carols and partaking of general cheer.

AMONG THE TEUTONS.

In Germany the decoration of the house begins on the morning of the 24th. One room, from which all save "die mutter" are rigidly excluded, contains the Christmas tree and all the presents set in a shining row upon the table. Upon the dining table a great cold supper is served. Family and guests begin to gather at five o'clock. At six the tree is disclosed, whereupon there is a general scramble. Everybody kisses everybody else and there is a gay time generally for some hours. Then the late supper and to bed. Thus the German Christmas is well over before the day itself arrives. The family arise late in the morning of the 25th. The day is spent in paying and receiving visits, in which the children compare presents. In the evening there is a dance.

IN SOUTH AMERICA.

A Christmas celebration in Peru is distinctive. There are bewildering scenes of activity on Christmas eve in the cities especially Lima. Gaily dressed people fill the streets, and asses laden with fruits, liquors, and boughs from the mountains, ply in every direction. Ice-stalls, provided with chairs and benches are crowded by perspiring pleasure-seekers, who find ice necessary on sultry Christmas. At night there are gay doings. No door is closed, and there is music and dancing and the distribution of gifts in every house. To be a stranger is to be doubly welcome. All ceremony and restraint are absent, and merry pranks carried on by masked young folks are the rule. The midnight bell at the cathedral changes all. Every soul attends the mass. Again on Christmas morning the streets are crowded, but at nine o'clock there is another mass, followed by the feast, and games and sports, of which the chief is bull-fighting. The Christmas fight is generally the biggest of the season, as eight or ten bulls are frequently killed on that day, besides several horses, and not infrequently one or two of the fighting men.

At night there is a grand procession, headed by the priests and monks, followed by the soldiers and the people. All are in gala attire, and in the midst there is held aloft the figure of the Madonna, bearing in her arms the holy child. After a long march the procession is disbanded at the cathedral, and the Christmas celebration is at an end.

A WONDERFUL TIMEPIECE

WHEN Samuel Morse invented the electric telegraph in 1844, his recording instrument was considered a wonderful contrivance. When Fulton sailed the first steamboat up the Hudson river in 1807, besides being taken for a God by the Indians, his accomplishment was considered by the civilized world as being the greatest achievement of the century; and the people of today think the same thing of Edison's phonograph.

Although it is acknowledged that these inventions are greater than the ordinary watch, still it cannot be denied that the machinery that puts these discoveries into operation fades into insignificance when compared to the delicate mechanism of a timepiece. In the above-mentioned instruments and machinery the works can be properly adjusted with the unaided hand and naked eye, but in a watch, delicate instruments and powerful magnifying glasses are required for the proper adjustment of the hair-springs and the many minute wheels, and it can therefore be truly said that the watch is the most wonderful of inventions.

But now comes a marvelous development of a wonder. There is, in the city of Berlin, in Germany, a man who is the proud possessor of a timepiece which is considered to be the most marvelous piece of mechanism that human skill and fore-sight ever put together.

Ingenuity and human skill have been brought into operation with the result that a watch has been constructed which measures less than one-quarter of an inch in diameter, or with a face of about the size of a large-sized tack or nail. The case is made of the very finest gold and the whole watch weighs less than two grains, troy. It can be realized how light this is only when we consider that in troy weight it takes 480 grains to make an ounce, and that twelve ounces constitute a pound, or that 5,760 grains are contained in a pound. This wonderful piece of mechanism weighs only one-two thousand eight hundred and eightieth part of a pound. So great a curiosity is this midget considered that a man paid $1,946.00 for it, and he would not sell it for twice that amount.

The numerals on the face are in Arabic, and if the hands were put end to end they would not measure five-twenty-fourths of an inch long. It has, besides, just as an ordinary watch or clock, a second indicator which is about as large in diameter as the small hand is long, and the hand of this second indicator is less than one-sixteenth of an inch in length. The numerals here are also in Arabic, but are engraved in red to be more easily discernible.

The works and hands are made of the finest tempered steel and are set throughout in diamond chips. It is constructed on the most improved plan, being wound by the stem and set by pulling the stem out a short distance.

We all know how unselfish we are when it is a question of our telling people things for their good or of keeping still for our own.

Once upon a time a People were in a fair way of acquiring a sense of humor, but the Unthinking Many, having misgivings, recoiled.

"It will enable us, this sense of humor, to vote right on all matters not purely local!" urged the Discerning Few.

"Yes, but will it not stand in the way of our supporting a permanent orchestra?" objected the Unthinking Many, and were not to be persuaded.

Citizen—How long will it take you to drive to Park Place?

Cabman (tentatively)—Are yeh goin' to pay by th' mile or by the hour?—New York Weekly.

PIOUS FRAUD IN MINING CAMP

By Gilbert Reeves.

THE coach was sliding and grating down the long hill; it swung floutingly through the miserable hovels of the Mexican quarter, rattled past the brilliant temptation of the "Continual" saloon, and the less imposing facade of Trellcot's opposition establishment. "Big Jim," the driver, found an unthonged spot on the sides of his horses, and so persuaded them to a final spurt, which should emphasize the suddenness of the pull-up on the post office corner. All the men lounging there under the cottonwoods swayed and surged for a vantage ground whence to peer into the stage.

"Not a darned passenger!" cried Alf. Dixon.

"Boys, this camp's peterin' out just about as fast as the law allows, an' a little more so. This is the fourth night the coach's come empty. What the deuce—"

"Dry up, Alf!" It was Bruce Stewart the blonde young deputy sheriff, who rode guard over the treasure-box, now nimbly springing down from the top, Winchester in hand. "Give us a rest on your French talk. There's an old lady in there—a saintly old tenderfoot—Heaven help her there."

He opened the coach door and made a baluster of his strong arm.

"Now, ma'am, here you are at the office, if you'd like to enquire. Maybe some of these old citizens might tell you about your daughter—sorry I'm a stranger here, you might say," with an admonishing frown at the crowd. He guided the old lady into the house and pulled forward a big chair, then faced the gathering group, flushed and breathing hard. "Well! this stumps me!" He pushed his way to the door, then, raising his voice again, cried loudly in slangy Spanish: "Play numskulls, every man jack of you! That poor old soul has come out here to find her daughter, that she thinks is teaching school—she told me all about it coming up on the stage. It won't do to let her find out about it to-night, anyway—it's Carrie."

Then Mr. Stewart retreated with precipitation. He had killed his man at Georgetown, an adjacent camp, and, as to physical daring, perhaps no man in the country had greater hardihood. But his moral courage was not equal to this situation, and so Bruce Stewart fled the field.

Every man in the post office drug store had understood the young deputy's admonition, and all eyes turned on the tiny old figure sitting in their midst, all quaint and travel-worn, but still quite self-possessed. A very little old lady she was, with delicate features and wax-like coloring. A bunch of feathery white curls at either temple, in a fashion of years long gone. Her raiment was not antiquated, either as to fabric or fashioning, and yet, to a fanciful mind, it would suggest a lingering fragrance of lavender and faded rose leaves, or kindred essences, whose very memories now are neglected amid the things of a shadowy past.

After the succession of Bruce Stewart the old lady sat a few minutes glancing about with quiet composure. If the novelty of the scene surprised her she made no signs. Neither did she succumb to fatigue. She held her light shape erect as a girl's when she approached the postmaster.

"Are you the gentleman in charge?" she said, with a precise courtesy; and her thin, soft tone was a vocal rendering of old-fashioned, slanting Italian chirography. "Ah—the postmaster—yes. Then, no doubt, you will be able to direct me to my daughter—Miss Piatt. She—she is engaged in the profession of teaching."

Doctor Lucas adjusted his glasses on his thin, sharp nose, and looked at her crossly. He was probably the only man in the room who had not felt a thrill of chivalric sympathy at sight of her. He was a lean, dark, sallow, snappish little man, in chronic ill-humor, thanks to the rapid decline of business in the town, and the brow-beating of the virago wife. To-night he was in an even worse than usual temper, on account of the coach's late arrival, and the crowd in the drug store keeping him on duty there, while an overworked deputy, visible through the glass front of the post office enclosure, struggled alone through the distribution of the mail. He would have liked to drive the whole concourse without and close his doors upon them. Failing safety in that measure, he obeyed his instinct to bully a creature weaker than himself.

"There's only school ma'am in town, and he's a man!" he snarled. "I don't know anything about your daughter. She's not my sort. You'd better go over to Daniel's. Guess they can give you all the information you want."

She looked at him in doubt and wonder. In all her life her exquisite delicacy and femininity had warded off from her such roughness as this. A murmur of indignation began in the room; but it was silenced by one sweeping glance of significance from the bright blue eyes of a man who came forward and bent his stately head to the lady with perfect Creole grace.

"That suggestion is not a bad one; our friend here is uncultured and unmannerly, but he means well—we will take it for granted that he means well. Madam will you accept my escort to seek out your daughter? It may be an undertaking of time—life in this section is busy and hustling—people are self-centered, and pay little attention to their neighbors—the faculties of perception and observation become diminished—"

As he led his charge away, the pleasant cadence of his soft, Southern tone died away in the safe generalizing of platitudes, uttered with the intent of soothing while he gained time.

Every man in the drug store breathed freer, satisfied of this issue of this difficult and painful matter, since George Locke's tact and ingenuity would direct its arrangement. But one young fellow walked briskly to the post master, rubbing his broad hands in a very agony of indignation and disgust. His jaunty attire, astute slim German face, and sliding step made up an anomalous ensemble. This was Barney Heiman, the butcher. He exercised a shrewd business faculty, and was always in ample funds; his unfailing generosity with these resources gave him an assured standing among men, and might have secured him position in the heterogeneous social life of the town had he cared for such distinction. Moreover, his very soul was instinct with the innate chivalry that strikes root deeper than that learned at court.

"See here, Doctor Lucas!" he said; "I'm peaceful-minded, and all that, but I just can't stand no such o'ntry way o' talkin' to a lady—and an old lady, too! I'd have taken a hand myself, but—why, to talk to a lady, it just breaks me all up. But I'd just 's soon tell a man what I think of him—even if it's not very complimentary—as I would lassoo to a critter. And I think it's mighty rough for you to abuse and talk hard to an old lady about her daughter that she can't help about, and you got half-a-dozen half-breed kids runnin' around up here in Chihuahua, without any schoolin' and learnin' to steal and fill the dance-houses! I believe a man can be a man, if he's a gambler—if he ain't a tin-horn gambler!—and I think a man can stand up in a town and still want jumpin' on the worst kind! And I wouldn't stop much at doin' it!"

Barney's tirade met with approval; more particularly that clause referring to the hapless half-caste children Doctor Lucas had ignored since his marriage. Such a storm of reproach assailed Doctor Lucas as made him bend his craven head. Matters might have become serious for him but for the reaction of laughter over Bob Nugent's tipsy dictum. Bob was a gentleman, drunk or sober—more commonly drunk, poor fellow!—and he voiced his scorn of the druggist.

"'S not worth thrashin', Barney! Doc, yo' d'sherve duckin' 'n tailin' pond; 'n I'd give 't 't yo' I wasn't drunk."

George Locke timing his free step to the careful tread of that tiny figure beside him, swiftly revolving in his mind the situation, and determined to conduct his charge to a hotel, assumed to be "Daniel's" where he could, by collusion with the people, defend her from undesirable information, at least until she should be strengthened by a night's rest. What, then, was his dismay when the dainty footsteps paused on the broad sidewalk before a door whose streaming light made distinct the sign before the building—"Daniel's." She dropped his arm, and went straight in at the door.

"Is—is Daniel's a tavern? Have I come into the wrong place?"

She looked about at the unwonted surroundings—tiers of barrels, long shelves of flasks and bottles. Some young men were lounging in large cane arm-chairs and another, coatless, came forward from a tall desk.

"What place of business do you keep?" the old lady inquired politely.

He was a dark, boyish-looking young fellow, until one noticed the thoughtful brow and grey eyes, that belied his smooth cheeks and pleasure loving mouth. He flushed as he answered, very gently:

"We are liquor dealers."

The little old lady staggered slightly, almost as if the winey fumes began to affect her. Then she turned, with a timid fierceness to George Locke, standing in the doorway, pale and disconcerted.

"Why did that man send me to find news of my daughter here—at a saloon?"

Young Daniel's free flushed. He could hardly have got a keener stab than this, that struck home to his own deep sense of shame in his business. There was something very noble and brave in the young man's nature, subject as he had been to life-long evils of circumstance—surrounding and training. George Locke hardly knew which of the two he most pitied, as he interposed:

"Oh, that's simple enough. You see, all the news from the outside comes here to Daniel's first. Jack" with a look of meaning and caution—"have you heard how Carrie is getting along with her new school at Flintville? This lady is her mother. She don't know just where Carrie is just now."

The peculiar emphasis put on guard the young man, ready-witted and clever and educated to quick expedients by the practical exigencies of the section.

"No," replied young Daniel, pleasantly; "no mail has come in yet. You know she only went over to Flintville last Monday. We'll hear from there to-morrow or next day."

"We might walk around to the hotel and make sure," said George Locke. "Mrs. Piatt, will you wait me here—oh! I assure you there is no impropriety. The most irreproachable ladies of the camp make no scruples of coming in here to see the collection of minerals and ores. These things are different, you know, on the frontier. Here, Henry will you show Mrs. Piatt your cabinet?"

* * *

"You plan seems to me far-fetched and melodramatic," said young Daniels, gloomily.

George Locke had unfolded his plan of action, based on information his protegee had given in their slow walk from the post office to "Daniel's." But all the Southerne's magnetic eloquence could not convince the younger man.

"It is a bit theatrical," Mr. Locke conceded; "but practicable, I think. At all events it's our only salvation."

"What is the use to discuss the matter," said Jack Daniel bitterly. "Mrs. French would no more let the Aylmer come into her house, for any purpose whatever, than she would go down to the 'Continual' and accompany the Aylmer in one of her songs."

"Mistake, Jack. You don't know Mary French's true heart and sweet, womanly charity as I do. Jack, it's a great pity you two could not have met on equal ground. Or, failing that, it's a pity you ever met at all. Confound this free and easy frontier life! In any place where social regulations exist, Mary French would never have come in contact with a man in your position, and you'd have been spared a deal of suffering."

"George," cried the other, fiercely, what's the matter with you tonight?"

For, indeed, this turning the knife in another's wound was most uncharitable of George Locke, the tactful. He put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Jack," he said—and the tenderness of his tone was like the tenderness of a father—"Jack, don't you know I saw how deep a wound you got tonight from Carrie's mother? You're fighting against your own soul, Jack, as well as against your love. Give it all up, and go away from this. Begin all over again in a new country, and with Mary French—I believe you could do it. You ought. Nature made you for each other."

"See here," said Daniel doggedly, "if you want to risk your own fate, don't let any scruples about interfering with me deter you. I've had my little lesson; I shall never aspire to Mrs. French's hand again. Meanwhile, that poor old soul is left, forlorn and weary, in a place that seems to her polluting, no doubt. Let us go back to her."

"Jack," said Locke, "I will tell you a bit of a secret. I am not a marrying man. I was married at twenty-five, and within a year my wife became insane. Hereditary—but it had been kept from her, poor girl! She has been in an asylum these twelve years. Now, as you say, let us return to Mrs. Piatt. Make some excuse for my leaving her, and daily about for a while, before you bring her up to Mrs. French's. I must have time to explain to Mary."

"All right; but you understand I have nothing to do with tomorrow's business. Barney Heiman will help you. He's just the man—honest and hearty, and true; not so overburdened with style as some of the fellows who rank him."

"You'll come with Carrie yourself," said George Locke bluntly.

"Not I! Good God! Don't you see the difficulty of the situation?—the delicacy? How can I meet Mary French in company with the Aylmer?"

"None the less you will do it. Precisely for the reason of your complicated relations, we don't want Barney Heiman or any other, involved. Come Jack, brace up, and have some style about you," said Locke, disguising his sympathy in slang. "You must meet the obligation you have incurred. You're not the first man who has found 'his honor rooted in dishonor.'"

* * *

Physically, Mrs. French was an admirable match for the noble mould of George Lock's commanding type. Her well-built form was large, compact, and plump. Her cheeks were ruddy, her grey eyes clear, and here round facial lines all sweet and wholesome. She was the sort of woman men are apt to fancy—a sort of domestic goddess. But it does not always chance a goddess smiles on the plans of the sons of men. George Locke was astonished to find that his friend's objection to his proposition was based on personal reasons. The mere detail that it involved juggling with the religious faith of another had nothing repugnant to her strong rationalism. He perceived quite plainly that between her compassion for the unfortunate mother and the zest she found in his original if irreverent idea, she was fairly inclined to confederacy until the statement of the Magdalen's identity. Mr. Locke had of course been quite cognizant that Mrs. French had broken with her intended husband a week before the date set for their marriage, on discovering of his entanglement with the Aylmer. And yet he had confidently expected that generosity and sense of justice would ignore personal feeling in dealing with the matter in hand.

"You talk as if that poor girl were the only sinner in the world!" cried George Locke at last, exasperated by her obstinacy, while time was flying. "You are thoroughly unjust to her, and you are less generous than she. I didn't know that you could be so narrow-minded. Mary French, this woman you despise tries more sincerely—aye, I believe she does more—to help the weak and sinful than you do."

Mrs. French lifted her bowed head in amazement. But George Locke's noble kindly countenance was full of stern, sincerity and rebuke.

"I mean what I say. She preys on men, as is the manner of her kind—poor girl. But no man pays tribute to her at the expense of a family. Her speech is as blameless as your own, amid all the ribaldry that surrounds her; sometimes it has even seemed to me that her sweet songs purify the atmosphere about her. Oh, Mary French! you need not sneer. Men are not always full of evil. I do believe that many a one goes there to let her music work its spell on heart-chords that have long been silent."

"Do the people of the 'Continual' saloon find this mission work profitable, or is it a labor of love?" inquired Mrs. French, with meek sweetness.

He went on, ignoring the feminine sarcasm:

"She has been a veritable crusade against the young lads, mere boys, who used to haunt the saloons—calls them up to her piano, and talks to them like a mother. Ah, bah!" cried Locke, "it is folly to expect one woman to show another mercy. And yet," he added, his voice tremulous with some tender memory. "I have known one woman to warrant such confidence."

Mrs. French looked up.

"Would that woman have done what you ask me to do?" she demanded, a certain grievance in her tone.

Mr. Locke smiled to himself at that little touch of emulative jealousy, tending as it did to confirm his suspicion that Mrs. French's pride had suffered, rather than her affection in the rupture with her lover six months before. He must have been more than man if he had failed to perceive that her interest in himself was deeper than was strictly consistent with hopes quite blasted. It would have been abnormal, too, had he failed to take advantage of that weakness for the furtherance of his wishes.

"There was no selfish taint in her whole nature. She would have aided to the utmost what I thought right."

Mrs. French rose and looked into his face with eyes full of infinite enthusiasm and yearning pity, well-nigh divine.

"When will she be here—that dear, old lonely mother? Oh, we will be so good to her, will we not? And you—you really believed in my heartlessness—you know you did. What right had you to think me a Pharisee? For shame, George Locke! I thought you knew me better."

"In the nick of time!" thought the man, following helplessly as she moved to answer the knock announcing the weary pilgrim's coming. And he was not the first man—nor yet the last—constrained to own that as compared to the nimble wiles of women, men's artfulness is but a clumsy and transparent effort.

And so it was that twenty-four hours later Mary French, with diplomatic, deferential interest, sat listening to the disclosure on spiritualism, into which she had skillfully led her guest. It was not difficult to understand how all the more mystical and poetic phases of that creed had taken hold in this gentle, unphilosophic mind, of antiquated simplicity.

"I do not doubt that our dear ones return," she said; "but we do not perceive them often, for our senses are dulled by the world's gross usage. I have tried strenuously to comply with the conditions, in order that I might receive the materialized presence. I have sometimes thought that if my daughter——"

She stopped short, with a little, faint cry. A woman's form stood in a window giving upon the long, front gallery; a figure graceful, small, of perfect mould compassed about with filmy, misty clouds of vaporous white; the little head was banded round with bands of waving golden hair; the great blue eyes were full of mournful resignation, the sweet, full lips were sad, and the whole face was the face of a suffering angel. She held one lovely hand toward the twain within the room, and the sweet, sad lips spoke.

"Mother—return!"

Then swiftly and silently the vision was gone.

* * *

Jack Daniel did not tarry with the pseudo news he bore. The mother had not spoken when he came in. The details of his story had been skillfully devised. Small-pox had broken out in Flintville the week of the teacher's advent there. She had contracted the scourge, and a sudden chill had driven it on with swift congestion. Death had come very soon, and immediate interment had been needful. She had died with her mother's home upon her lips. Watching the mother carefully the young man was going on with tentative platitudes of sympathy, and the regrets of those who knew the dead girl. The old lady covered her dim eyes with her hand her delicate lips wrung piteously:

"You are very kind," she said, still with precision. "but—will you leave me in solitude with my sorrow? Dear young lady, will you come to me later on? Tomorrow I will leave you."

* * *

Without a word, Mary French and Jack Daniel went softly to the room where George Locke was watching beside the Aylmer. She cowered like some stricken creature, still veiled by the foamy masses of clinging tulle, that had made her appearance at the window ghost-like. The Creole touched their hostess, bending down humid eyes.

"Say something to her," he said pitifully. "I think her mother's suffers with you. She would not stay in here with Daniel, but made him go and leave me with her."

That argument was an unwise one. It was not enough, then, that her old lover stood here with his face downcast, in conscious shame for his relations with this fallen creature! She must ply her nefarious acts upon the other man, trading upon his chivalry. Mrs. French's face hardened as her heart grew hard again. The crouching woman lifted her tear-stained visage and came to stand before the other, with pleading written on every line of her bearing.

"I have no right to even thank you," she said, "and yet I would lay down my life for your pleasure. Don't think I do not feel my shame—I even recognize the mockery of my being wrapped in this," she bent her lips gratefully and reverently to the airy gauze about her. It was Mary French's bridal veil that she had brought out hastily when their project had been found to lack such an accessory. "Oh, there is nothing like a woman's kindness to a woman! The love of men, at best, is only a selfish passion. In all the greatest crises of a woman's life, she wants a woman's ministering. I have been so long shut out from that sweet consolation—oh, for my very soul's sake, speak to me, and help me."

But Mrs. French stepped back and answered coldly.

"I am sorry for your distress. I think your unfortunate mother will be needing me. My parlor is at your service, as anything you may require to recover your composure. Mr. Locke, my hospitality is in your hands."

* * *

A fire at their corral disabled the stage company's rolling stock, so that the outgoing coach was not in readiness to leave until the lamps lighted in the "Continual" saloon twinkled their reflections in the malodorous pool above the dam. The usual knots of loungers stood in waiting as it swung around to the post office under the cottonwoods. Young Daniel, standing despondently nearby, spoke to the driver.

"Wait, Jim; George Locke will bring you another passenger shortly."

Jim put out his under lip, in jealousy of his importance.

"That's all right. I know. Told me he'd see the old lady down to the railroad. George is a good fellow—for a rebel that was.

The crowd took up the word. "Old lady." "Carrie's mother," "Going back," "Jack, how did Locke settle that business? He's kept it mighty mum."

"Ask him," said young Daniel, briefly.

"Seems 's if it's kind o' rough for Carrie to have to play tonight," hazarded one rugged prospector in overalls.

"Rough nothing. Business is business," said a pert young accountant.

"Wonder how the firm will like the lonesome kind of tunes she's giving us tonight."

"Go slow on that. Here's Locke and the old lady."

As the pair settled back in their seats a steady flaw of wind set for some moments thither, and brought the singer's voice and words so clearly that Jim delayed, with whip in air, to catch the old familiar strain:

"That—oh, that voice sounds like my poor dead daughter's!" And, as the coach lurched away, she hid her face on George Locke's shoulder, with an outburst of tears that were the first she had shed in her sad, sorrowful sojourn there.

Billy's Adventure at Christmasteria

Story for Young People by J. A. Rueger.

IF Billy's mother might have had her way Billy could never have owned any kind of a gun, although his father was willing to get him one, so it was a kind of compromise between both parents that he was permitted to use an aged and much battered army musket of a bygone generation. And the only reason his mother finally yielded to this was that she reasoned that inasmuch as Billy in spite of his 13 years was only three feet long and the gun was six, under no circumstances could he manage to be at both ends of the weapon at one and the same time, thus rendering this particular arm less dangerous from her point of view than any with which he might have been intrusted.

But she did not realize what injurious effects her commendable prudence might have on her boy's morals, for whenever Billy staggered off on a hunting trip under his huge piece of artillery his thoughts concerning the old firearm found vent in words which small boys should not utter. Still it must be admitted that there was a certain appropriateness in his allusions to himself as a "poor little son-of-a-gun;" neither would much imagination be required to use him as a model for Eneas leaving Troy. But all this is neither here nor there.

Billy was out the day before Thanksgiving.

On this particular day Billy encountered an old buck which had on several occasions tantilized the young hunter by his lordly contempt of the poorly proportioned combination of small boy and big gun, for it was always Billy's luck to meet the animal when he was at the greatest disadvantage, so all he could do was to stand helplessly swearing as the magnificent beast stalked majestically by. This time it further exasperated the lad by deliberately stopping within 50 feet and calmly surveying him as if in mockery of the hunter and his unwieldly implement of destruction. Such effrontery was more than Billy could stand. By a mighty effort he hove his weapon upward with the stock adjusted to his shoulder and in spite of his inability to sustain it in a horizontal position managed to catch a snap-shot as the muzzle descended and pulled the trigger.

The huge blunderbuss went off with a deafening roar and Billy went whirling head over heels in the snow just as he expected, but to his dismay instead of coming to a standstill at the end of a half-dozen revolutions as was usually the case, he felt himself going over and over in the firm embrace of a huge snow-ball which had collected about him as he revolved until now he was the center of a mighty avalanche careering madly downward.

Billy's thoughts were so thoroughly confused by this performance that for a time he found himself unable to think at all, but after a bit he became faintly conscious of an indistinct desire to know what was happening to him. There had been no downward slope near him when he fired the gun, as he was in the bottom of a ravine and he could not account for the situation at all.

He made an effort to solve the problem but finding that the rapid rotation shook his thoughts apart as fast as he collected them he finally concluded to postpone further investigation until a better opportunity should present itself.

This came sooner than expected, for without the slightest warning the huge snowball in which he was inclosed broke open and he dropped out. For a moment he was too dazed to see where he was, but as his senses strayed in one by one, he began to gaze about until he suddenly found himself confronted by a grotesque little mannikin who was capering up and down before him with every indication of uncontrollable fury.

"What do you mean by bringing all that snow in here?" shrieked the little man, at the same time vigorously whacking the unfortunate boy with a stick he carried. "Who gave you permission to come in at all?" he continued, still administering blows with all his might.

Billy between pain and fear began to howl so lustily that the little man finally desisted from further punishment, but with threatening mein demanded an explanation.

"I didn't bring in no snow," he whimpered, "'twas the snow brung me in and I don't see what you want to hit a feller fur what he didn't do nothin'."

"But how'd you get in? how'd you get in?" shrieked the dwarf in wild frenzy, waving his stick threateningly over Billy's head as if on the point of giving him another drubbing.

Billy did not reply at once for by this time he had come into possession of his usual self and was beginning to take an interest in his surroundings. He saw that he was in what appeared to be a large cave, in which hundreds of tiny lights flickered, and that his tormentor was a tiny dwarf, at least a head shorter than himself, whose most prominent peculiarities were a pair of skinny legs, a tremendous paunch, a long, flowing beard, which swept down over the rotund abdomen, and a large hooked nose. On his head he wore a long pointed cap ending in a tassel, while on either side of his beaklike nose gleamed a little black eye.

While Billy had been making these observations the little man had been shrieking at him incessantly, "How'd you get in?" and not getting a reply as promptly as his impatience demanded, brought the stick down with a resounding thump on Billy's head.

Roused to action by the resumption of hostilities, Billy started to his feet with the intention of running, but as he arose the insignificance of his adversary suddenly dawned upon him and before the dwarf could strike a second blow Billy had him by the beard with one hand while with the other he sent a hot punch into the little, round stomach of the enemy. The next second the tables turned. Billy had the stick and used it until the little man begged for mercy and then only did Billy let him up.

Mutual explanations were next in order, and by the time these were over the two were on such excellent terms that Billy went so far as to restore the stick to its original owner. He told how he had fired at the deer and the resulting occurrences, while on the other hand the little man told the boy what place he was then in.

"This is Christmasteria, the kingdom of Santa Claus, and I am the head gardener. This is where all the Christmas toys are grown for you children up above," and as Billy gazed about him open-mouthed he saw vast multitudes of beautiful Christmas trees all ablaze with tiny candles and glittering tinsels and gold. Under his feet was a soft turf of green excelsior, while all around were flocks of all kinds of toy birds and animals whistling and chirping as only Christmas toys can. Billy was in ecstasies and gave vent to his glee in such an enthusiastic way that his guide fairly glowed with pleasure.

There was everything there from toy pop-guns up to breech-loading shotguns and rifles, and as Billy feasted his eyes upon them he felt that even heaven could not be a more delightful place than this.

Billy was fairly saturated with bliss. "Jimminy crickets!" he ejaculated in the height of boy'sh admiration, "wouldn't I like to have one of them. Wish I knowed how to raise 'em like you," he added enviously to his guide. Then a bright thought struck him.

"Say, feller," he said, "won't you give me a little seed? I want to raise a gun when I git home.

"Why you can get seed above ground to raise any of these things," returned the little man.

"Kin I?" asked the boy eagerly, "what's it look like?"

"I'll show you some," said the dwarf and led the way to a large number of barre's which stood near by. Billy crowded forward and looked as the covering was raised.

"Hully Gee!" he shouted in astonishment as the contents of the barrel were revealed, "them's money," and involuntarily both hands made a dive for the shining coins, but the dwarf had anticipated his action and quickly slammed the cover down, catching Billy's fingers and pinching them until he begged to be let loose. But not until Billy had promised to refrain from further meddling did his captor release him. Then as if nothing had happened he went on to explain.

"Yes, it's money we raise these toys from, but the same kind of seed can be made to grow into any number of things. It all depends on what I do with it. I can make a nickel grow into a tin whistle or a china doll just as I please. Some things take only a single cent, while others take several dollars. Now a gun like that one you were looking at needs at least a five dollar seed and the better ones even more.

Billy forgot about his smarting fingers as he again turned to the row of opening guns. Lovingly placing his hands on one which had taken his fancy he asked coaxingly: "Say, feller, gimme this one, won't yer?"

The little man shook his head, but Billy pleaded, yet more earnestly, at the same time almost unconsciously working the gun loose from its root. All his coaxing seemed in vain and finally the little man in some irritation ordered him to release his hold on the arm. A sudden temptation seized Billy. He was no longer afraid of the little gardener, besides he owed him a grudge for his sore fingers; why, then, should he not take the gun? With a quick jerk he had it out of the ground.

"I'm goin' to take it anyway," he said defiantly, preparing to defend his prize by force if necessary, but quicker than a flash the dwarf had wielded his stick and struck a violent blow on Billy's head and in an instant the whole scene faded away.

When Billy opened his eyes to find his father anxiously bending over him it seemed to him as ages had elapsed since he had last seen the spot where he was lying. Not far away he saw the old gun half buried in the snow, while a little farther he saw a sight which restored his senses like magic. The antlered monarch of the forests who had so often aroused Billy's ire lay stark and stiff with the three buckshot, which Billy dropped into every charge "just for luck," buried in his brain.

With a weak shout he tried to rise but his head was giddy and with a happy smile he relapsed into his father's arms.

"I killed him, pop," he said proudly, though faintly, while his father gently applied snow to the bruises on the lad's forehead, where the gun had struck in its tremendous recoil.

"Sure enough you did, Billy," replied the father soothingly, "but I ought to be killed for ever letting you go out with that old cannon. It's a wonder it hasn't killed you long ago."

"Say, pop," said Billy eagerly, "if you let me plant five dollars it'll grow into a crackerjack of a gun. I kin do it, 'cos I seen it down in Christmasteria."

"Guess the boy's head's a little mixed yet," soliloquized the parent, but Billy denied that his head troubled him at all and persisted in his statement until he had told his astonished father all about his advent