THE NEW YEAR.

BY H. M. D.

I sat alone in my chamber,
The light was burning low;
I had finished the work before me.
Begun long months ago.
'Twas nearing the midnight hour,
And, leaning back in my chair,
I heard the soft, sweet chiming
Of distant bells on the air.

Then open I threw the shutter,
And gazed on a lovely scene—
The earth lay wrapped in ermine,
'Neath a full moon's radiant beam
And, ushered amid such brightness,
Came a smiling, glad New Year;
While voices in yonder chapel
Sang it a welcome dear.

Then I turned again to the table,
Where my work was laid aside:
'Twas finished and neatly folded,
Just as the old year died.
Thus may my soul's fair garment
Finished and ready be,
When the joyful bells of heaven
Usher eternity.

—*Sel.*

DEACON SUNSHINE.

A Story for the Holidays.

BY MRS. ANNIE A. PRESTON.

A modest little man was the good brother, who well merited his pleasant title of Deacon Sunshine by allowing the generous glow of God's love to shine out in cheerful smiles upon his kindly face, and by warming the hearts of all with whom he came in contact by his beneficent acts and gracious words.

The uninitiated sometimes wondered why the Lord's work was always progressing in Conway, and why the churches seemed to be in that state of activity that suggests a natural summer heat, souls being constantly garnered into the church and all the signs of the time pointing heavenward.

A few noticed that this gratifying state of affairs was largely due to the fact that Deacon Sunshine, with his rare tact that consisted mainly of that "charity which is love," slipped like a veritable sunray into the confidence of every unconverted person of his acquaintance.

The light he carried was heavenscent. It glowed upon and warmed any tiny rootlet of faith to be found in any heart; when by tender nurture the little plant had developed strength and vigor and could no longer be hidden, the good deacon would say to the new born Christian, "Now, my friend, I do not insist that you unite with the church to which I belong, but I do insist that with your Bible for your guide you make a public profession of your faith, and endeavor to live acceptably as a member of Christ's visible family on earth."

After a time it came about that you would hardly find another country town where so large a proportion of the people, old and young, were working Christians as in Conway. And as these people tried to live, the men voting as they prayed, the community was quite a model spiritually, morally, mentally and physically; there being few intemperate people and few offspring of intemperate parents. They were a marvellously united people, too. Did a fog of discontent or a cloud of strife arise, a visit from Deacon Sunshine speedily dissipated them, and all icebergs of pride or exclusiveness were melted by the same genial influence.

Yet Deacon Sunshine and his gentle wife, who forwarded all his genial influences, were very quiet people in humble circumstances, doing each day cheerfully the duty nearest at hand. They were thankful for God's loving care and for the good-will of their neighbors, and did not dream that in time of need this good-will should radiate in prismatic glory, proving itself to be garnered and reflected sunshine, God-given.

In turn, had the people of Conway been asked for the name of their most popular citizen, they would have hesitated over Timothy Dutton, Orcutt Webb and Hammett Wright without coming to any decision whatever, and without taking Deacon Sunshine at all under consideration. So true is it of most of us that blessings are not appreciated until they have flown.

One pleasant summer's afternoon, while the kindly old couple were attending a wedding in the next town, a little flurry of a shower descended upon the village of Conway, and from the black, pent-up face of the passing cloud leapt forth a lightning shaft that splintered the roof of the Sunshine cottage, and wrapped the whole tiny structure in hungry flames.

The good deacon and his wife made no ado. "Praise the Lord for His mercy in sparing our unprofitable lives," he said. And she added, "Let us thank Him also that our most valuable possession, the tall clock that was your grandfather's, is at the loan exhibition." And then they congratulated each other upon the fact that they had just received an invitation from friends "out West" to make them a visit, and that their Sunday clothes were saved by the reason of their having them on.

"I think we had better start off right away," said Deacon Sunshine. "The house lot, the ruins, and the elm tree will take care of themselves, and we can sell the tall clock for money enough to pay our railway fares. It is a mercy that there was no insurance on the house, for now no one will be distressed but our two selves."

"There is no telling when we shall ever come back," said Deacon Sunshine at the railway station next morning, looking across the meadow at the church spire and at the churchyard within its shadow, "but this is *home* as far as this world goes."

His voice trembled, although he made a brave effort to be cheerful, and it was fortunate that the express train came rushing into the little station just then, as the sunshine of the deacon's farewell smile might have availed to crystallize a sudden shower of tear-drops.

That night at the regular Wednesday evening prayer-meeting, the pastor quite naturally referred to Deacon Sunshine's great loss and to his going away, and to the fact that it was the first devotional meeting that he had ever led in that room uncheered by the presence of his two aged and excellent parishioners. The church was one of those prosperous ones where the attending of prayer-meetings was looked upon as a privilege, and as the pastor closed, nearly every one in the room was in tears. A sad silence fell upon the congregation for a moment, broken almost immediately by the clear and earnest voice of a child,—one of the little lambs who had been encouraged to always have a Scripture text for the prayer-meeting, and who now, with her heart stirred by the pastor's words, had no fear in relating the comforting little experience that had given rest to the troubled hearts in her own household. She said:

"We all cried at our house because Sunshine Cottage was burned, and the dear Deacon and Auntie Sunshine had taken themselves right away without saying good-by; and my mamma said that grieving never helped ourselves nor any one else out of trouble, and she said my sister and I might piece a bed-quilt for Auntie Sunshine, and at Christmas—you know Christmas comes every year at the first of the winter—she would take the money she expected to use for little presents for us and for extra fixings to buy cotton-batting, and the time she usually takes for extra baking, she would take to tack the quilt, and so they would be sure of one article toward going to housekeeping should they come back, and mamma said we could all pray for them every day, and I just thought that all of us who feel so badly might do that."

"Amen," said the pastor, heartily. "Praise the Lord, that from the lips of a babe He has given us a plan of work. How many are willing to turn their Christmas 'extras' into the one channel of helping our beloved friends?"

Every one in the large, well-filled room rose to their feet, from Simple Stephen, who never had anything at any time only what was given to him in charity, to Mrs. Timothy Dutton, who was the richest woman in the county.

The good spirit with which the work began—or which began the work—immediately contaminated the other Conway churches. A method of work was at once amicably agreed upon, and in a very short space of time a second Sunshine Cottage was rising from the ashes of the old one.

The whole matter was kept a profound secret from the beloved old couple, and as Christmas drew near, Hammett Wright himself, Conway's wealthiest citizen, having business in Chicago, made it in his way to fetch them home.

Conway was one of those places where a reunion praise service, participated in by all denominations, was in the order of things on Christmas morning; and all the plans worked together so well that the dear old couple arrived at the station just as the bells were ringing for church Christmas morning; and Deacon and Auntie Sunshine rejoiced in the privilege of going with the other worshippers.

The church was like a bower of evergreen and holly, and the service a joyful one, from the invocation to the closing "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow," and the faces of the old couple as they joined were in a glow of pleasure beautiful to see.

Immediately when the benediction was pronounced the Conway brass band was heard outside, and the people filed out and formed themselves in line.

"Deer me *suz*, deacon," said Auntie Sunshine, turning round and round and shaking hands right and left, "Everybody is here; I don't for the life of me see who are at home basting the turkeys."

This speech, handed from lip to lip, raised such a laugh as never before enlivened the air of Conway, for it was an open secret that only one turkey was roasting in Conway that day.

By this time the deacon and his wife were in the procession, marching to very lively music. It was only a little way, just past Col. Pomeroy's and the town hall, then the new cottage burst into view.

"Deary me!" exclaimed the sweet old lady. "Deary me! I have been suspicionis' all along that I was dreamin', and now I know I am. Do wake me up, somebody. No, don't wake me up. Just let me have a good look at it. Just our same old cottage, only this is a new one with a porch. I always wanted a porch. And a bay window! I never expected to have a bay window! The plants in the pots are my very own plants, I do believe. And if there isn't our old cat Tabby asleep on the sill! All just as I have wished a thousand times we could have it fixed up. Strange such things never happen only in dreams!"

By that time the procession came to a halt in front of the neat gate; the small boys and girls scattered Christmas greens and late chrysanthemums all along the walk through the pretty yard. The pastor threw open the cottage door with a, "Welcome home, dear friends, with a cordial Christmas welcome from all hearts."

As they entered the wisdom of the furnished parlor, the dear old tall clock, standing in the corner with a freshly varnished face, rang out the twelve strokes for noon, and in answer to the Deacon's "Poosh, poosh, poosh!" the big tabby cat, who had been cared for by the neighbors during their absence, came bounding from her sunny place in the window to purr her welcome.

The odorous fumes of turkey and pudding from the oven of the new cooking stove in the convenient kitchen aroused all the dear woman's housewifely instincts, and passing through the dining-room, she found the table laid for two, and discovered that their guests had left them to themselves.

There was never a happier community than that, nor a merrier Christmas Day, for the real Christmas spirit of "peace and good-will" reigned, and all, from the youngest to the oldest, fully realized the beautiful old truth: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Maple Corner, Willington, Conn.

The Brown Towel.

"They must be very poor who have nothing to give," said Mrs. Jarvis, as she deposited a pair of beautiful English blankets in a box that was being filled by the ladies of the church, to be sent to the poor.

"And now, ladies, as you are nearly through, I would like to tell you an incident in my life. I was once very poor.

"You once very poor?" said a lady.

"Yes; I was once very poor. There came to our village a missionary to deliver a lecture. I felt very desirous to go, but, having no decent apparel to wear, I was for this reason, deprived of going to church, although I was a member.

"I waited till it was late, and then slipped in and took a seat behind the door.

"I listened with streaming eyes to the missionary's account of the destitution and darkness in heathen lands. Poor as I was, I felt it to be a great privilege to live in a Christian land and be able to read my Bible.

"It was proposed by our pastor that the congregation should fill a box, and send it out with the missionary on his return.

"Oh, thought I, how I would like to send something. When I returned home my poor children were still sleeping soundly, and my disconsolate husband was waiting for my return; he had then been out of employment for some time.

"After he had gone to bed I went to look over my clothes, but I could find nothing suitable for the box that I could possibly spare; then I began to look over the children's things, but could find nothing that the poor dear children could be deprived of; so I went to bed with a heavey heart and lay a long time thinking of the destitution of the poor heathen, and how much better off I was.

"I got to thinking over my little stock again. There was nothing I could put in the box, except two brown towels.

"Next day I got my towels, picked out the best one, and when it was almost dark, put on my bonnet, went to the church, slipped my towel into the box and came away, thinking that the Lord knew I had done what I could.

"And now, ladies, let me tell you; it was not long after that before my husband got into a good situation, and prosperity has followed us ever since. So, I date back my prosperity to this incident of the brown towel."

Her story was done, and as the carriage was waiting at the door, she took her departure, leaving us all mute with surprise, that one so rich and generous had been trained to give amid poverty.

GLEANS.

"Maggie, I don't like to see this dust on the furniture." "All right, mum. I'll shut the blinds right away." —*Boston Post.* Yes, so it is in other things. We often darken our souls when we are disinclined to get rid of what is unsightly.—ED.

"I am ambitious," said Alonzo, proudly. "I cannot plod; I want my name to go down in history." "Well," said Imogen, "it will probably go down about as low as it can get." And now they never speak as they pass around.—*Burlington Hawkeye.*

An Alabama negro was heard to soliloquize philosophically: "De sun am so hot, de cotton am so grassy, de work am so hard, dat dis darkey feel called upon to preach." Any man who begins to preach because he thinks it easy, will make a mistake,—unless he is about like the old negro. —ED.

A gentleman noticing that his wife's bonnets grew smaller and smaller, and the bills larger and larger, calmly said: "I suppose this thing will go on until the milliner will send nothing but the bill." What is worthless often costs more than what is of value, and what is worse than nothing, most of all.—ED.

We laugh at the folly of the dog trying to run away from the kettle that is tied to his tail; and yet I have known a man, with an intelligent brain, perfect reasoning faculties, and an immortal soul, to run clear from Maine to California to escape from his bad reputation. We laugh at the dog with the can. Poor dog he is only a brute, and does not know any better.—*Brooklyn Eagle.*

There never was a better example of the concise form of expression common to real Western Americans than the answer of the man of the Sierras, who, when asked about the character of a neighbor, replied, "Mister, I don't know very much about him; but my impression is that he'd make a first-class stranger."—*Bloomington Eye.* Better not try and be sure about some things. If we suspect a man is bad, it is wise to avoid intimacy.—ED.

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