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The Acadian,

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Select Poetry.

CHRISTMAS.

Glad Christmas comes, and every hearth
Makes room to give him welcome now,
E'en want will dry its tears in mirth,
And crown him with a holly bough.

Thou day of happy sound and mirth
That long with childish memory stays,
How blest around the cottage hearth,
I met thee in my younger days!

—Clare.

Interesting Story.

Hannah's Christmas.

"Hope ye'll have a merry Christmas to-morrow, Hanner," said David Wray, proprietor of the little store at the settlement on Hadock Mountain.

"Thank ye kindly, David, an' now give me six sticks of candy, three of 'em peppermint, an' three birch," said the woman, taking her bundles from the rude counter.

"I'll 'low these is fer Reub's Christmas," he said, taking down the candy-jar from the window.

Old man Crapple, who had been a mildly interested observer, now came forward as Hannah was going out. "Goin', be ye, Hanner?" he said.

"This is capital weather fer Christmas, new ain't it? We haint hed no heavy snow ter block up the roads. Be ye wantin' anythin' done to yer place? Ef so, jes' say th' word?"

Being assured she was in no immediate need of friendly offices, he wished her "a merry Christmas ter-morrer," and withdrew to the fire-place.

Before the door stood her primitive sled, on the seat of which was an overgrown boy who held the reins over a sleek gray mare. Seeing her come out, he chuckled gleefully, pointing to the candy-jar now restored to its place.

"Now ain't it? ain't it jes'—?"

As he was given to uttering broken sentences, she gently nodded as she placed her bundles under the bear-skin robes, and climbed in beside him. The mare started off briskly, and they speedily left behind the few log houses, the store and blacksmith's shop. The wooden runner sank softly into the snow. The crows went heavily flapping overhead, and a flock of birds twittered as they perched upon some dead mullein.

But as the narrow road crawled upwards into the heart of the hills, all sounds of life died away and nothing was heard save the occasional soft thud of the falling snow that had been massed upon the trees. The perspective of the woods stretched away a silent land of magical dreams; the very cascades were mute—frozen into silver ribbons upon the bare rock faces.

But Hannah and Reuben—mountain bred and born—were not oppressed by silences that were part of their existence. As they jogged along, they knew well where, after a level space, they would come upon the clearing with its thirty acres of land, and the log cabin that was their home.

The mare knew it, too, for breaking her trot, she started into a ridiculous canter, and did not stop until she reached the barn and greeted her foal within it with a loud whinny.

A team of dun oxen stretched their necks over the fence rail, a white-faced cow and a brindled heifer were pulling down wisps of hay on the sunny side of a barrack. In the pen close by grunted four fat pigs, while under a shed, black, red-combed hens and a cock were scratching the loose gravel. These were Hannah Byle's "critters." This was the home where she had lived all her days.

In her youth Hannah had been the mountain belle; a pretty, amiable girl, so docile that Luther Byles, her father, averred, "thet thet Hanner of his'n couldn't be made to find downright fault with th' old bid un himself; she wer thet soft-hearted thet th' wild

beasts even hed no fear of her."

He himself indolently relied on this soft-heartedness. He knew the team would be watered without his help when they came from the field; that the cow would lose in the barn-yard that ugly gear that kept her from breaking fence while in pasture; and that the lame sheep would have its wants supplied.

He "lowed there wa'n't his gal's equal in th' hull world," his known word being bounded by the valley on one side, and Pottsville, where the county court was held, on the other. Perhaps if he had been more a man of the world, he would never have taken so entirely on trust the winning young stranger who, when Hannah was eighteen, found his way into the solitudes of Hadock Mountain and was entertained at Luther's cabin.

The mountaineers were one and all pleased with him, but were considerably disturbed in their slow minds when it became known "thet he an' Luther's Hanner had been jined together by the elder to Pottsville."

Discovering, however, that her parents were agreed to the match, and that her husband left her with them in his frequent jaunts to the world beyond, they mildly accepted matters, "ez something thet hed ter be."

A year after, one cheery Christmas morning, a boy-baby was born to Hannah. But by this time her husband had grown tired of this episode in his life—his simple, ignorant wife and her rustic congeners—and being a man devoid of moral principle, deliberately left her, and she never saw him again. For weary months she refused to believe in his perfidy, then, when hope was dead, she made no outcry.

"She hed allers bin a gal of few words," Luther said pityingly.

Her child was the apple of her eye. He was a beautiful, healthy little fellow, but the neighbors really felt it to be their duty to expostulate against the Byleses setting too much store by him. Idols were a snare of the Evil One. But, poor baby! his sad fate embalmed him forever in their sympathies, and many a mountain mother told the story over and over to her sad-eyed little ones. We will tell it in Luther's own words, as he told it with despairing iteration to his last days.

"We wer gone ter th' settlement fer some notions, Melindy an' me, that mornin', an' Hanner an' Bobby were to hum alone. 'Twer a purty day an' she wer out of doors with him, pickin' posies down thar by the turn in the road, when she jes' heered that colt Burney makin' a racket in the lane.

"Ye know thar's planks thar fer the critters ter git over the brook; an' thar wer a bad hole into 't thet I'd bin meanin' fer ter tinkle up a long spell, but it hed kinder passed along an' no harm come till thet thar mornin', when it hed ter be thet Burney must git his foot into 't."

"Ye know Hanner's thet soft-hearted she can't 'bide nothin' ter be in trouble, so she jes' leaved Bobby settin' on the edge of the woods, an' tellin' him not ter stir, she goes down ter see ter the colt. Waa! Burney was a restless young critter, an' was mighty scared, an' she hed trouble ter keep him from breakin' his leg; but she managed ter git him free, an' then she hurried back ter Bobby.

"But, bless you, man, Bobby weren't thar! Jes' his leste shoe lay by a scun wi' th' posies into 't."

"Queer, wa'n't it, thet the minute we come long the road an' I heered Hanner callin' him, I knew somethin' wer wrong? Th' hull settlement ter a man turned out ter hunt up that leste creature, but he wa'n't ter be found, jest ez ef a wild varmint hed cotched him, or the earth swallowed him up.

"But thar' come a time when we jes' hed ter give it up an' set down quiet. When it come frost an' cold, an' we uns hed ter shet the door of evenin's, 'twer jest ez ef we war sluttin'

thet baby out, an' it war ez ef we could hear his leste voice off ih th' cold an' dark, wailin', 'Mammy! mammy! Seemed ez ef his leste sperrit must be walkin'! An' Hanner! Why, man, 'twer enough ter break a heart of stunner hear her go on, an' her allers a creature of s.ch fw words!

"What hev I did thet I should lose my baby this cruel way?" she cried. 'Ef I could hev held him in my arms an' kissed his breath away; ef he could a gone straight from lookin' inter my eyes ter th' angels, I could hev borne it; but oh, ter hev my lamie wanderin', starvin', dyin', an' wonderin' why mammy war so cruel ez not ter come fer his callin'! Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

"Pore child! it did seem ez ef she war questionin' the Almighty, but arter a while she quieted down, fer yer know thet is ez her to be!"

Only a few more years, however, and Luther repented the pitiful story no longer, for death claimed him; but his last words were to Hannah, "When I get yonder, daughter, an' find leste Bobby, I'll tell him how ye grieved 'bout his dyin' thet lonesome way."

After Luther's death his wife speedily followed him, as if she could not exist without his rugged companionship; and Hannah was left alone. Gentle and childlike, she was not incapable. Luther's manner of educating his girl had been to bring her up in a full knowledge of his agricultural operations, so that she was not at a loss to till her farm advantageously.

Physically she was strong and well, and in all probability length of days lay before her. The mountaineers regarded her with pitying favor, and in a manner regarded her as a legacy left in their trust, and were always ready to help her in neighborly fashion. And she recompensed them as as she was able in simple, kindly way.

A poor woman dying and leaving her boy—a natural, as they called him—homeless, Hannah took him to her home and gave him her best; and the folk "lowed it were good fer both of 'em, fer now Hanner could hev company an' help with th' chores an' poor Reub could hev vittles an' house-room."

So the years came and went, bringing seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, until at last there dawned upon Hannah that Christmas morning that old man Crapple and Store-keeper Wray had wished to be a merry one.

In these remote solitudes, Christmas festivities were simple. Although greens were plentiful, the country people never used them to bedeck their dwellings, and Christmas-trees were an innovation that had not yet gladdened the juveniles. But they suspended stockings beside the cavernous fire-places, to which, at gray dawn, stole breathless children, eager to rifle their rude and scanty contents.

Thus it was that Reuben, almost before the day had fairly broken, taking down with eager hands his blue stocking, chuckled ecstatically over the six sticks of solid sweetness and the peculiarly shaped dough-out-man found therein.

It was a clear, cold morning. Ice had formed in the water-trough and hung in crystals from the eaves, and every rude post and rail and branch and tiny twig was furred with a delicate frost that was the very witchery of beauty, while the sun-rays, striking down through the encircling mist, kissed the bleak, frowning rocks to a rosy redness.

Here, far remote from the world's tumults, this Christmas morning had an inexpressible calm; the earth seemed waiting for that glorious song to break the stillness: "On earth peace, goodwill towards men."

When Hannah and the boy went to tend to the wants of the stock, they were welcomed with evidences of joy. Old gray whinnied, the pigs squealed lustily, the cattle lowed, and the chick-

ens uttered faint cackles as they disconsolately huddled together. Not until the comfort of these dumb creatures was fully seen to did they return to the house. There Reuben, with his face aglow from the frosty air, had built up in the deep fire-place a breast-work of dry hickory upon the back log and smouldering forestick, from which presently the flame leaped upward in ruddy jets. The breakfast sent forth its savory smell. The malted cat slept on the hearthstone. An air of homely comfort pervaded all.

After breakfast Hannah tidied the never disorderly kitchen, and because it was Christmas Day, sat down in a sort of Sabbath-day quiet.

"I want ter tell ye why it air Christmas, Reuben," she said.

He sat beside her silently, although he could comprehend little that was not in tangible shape before him; but he sorted his candy and smacked his lips over its sweetness. She was unlettered, but her simple, vivid word-pictures caught his fancy. She told him of the child in the manger. He could see the little red barn, with old Gray in her stall, the rack piled with succulent hay, and the dun oxen looking with mild, astonished eyes at a baby crying there.

"It war a pore place fer a baby," he said. "The mother shouldn't—"

Then his restless eyes fell wandering, he saw something through the window. "A man out thar! A big horse!" he cried, and ran joyfully to the door.

Hannah followed him, glad to see a neighbor, but she did not know whose was the animal that was being blanketed and tied to the fence-rail, and the young man who made his way towards the house was a stranger.

"Does Hanner Crawdon live here?" he asked, doffing his cap.

It was the first time in years she had been called by her husband's name.

"Yes, thet air me, tho' its by my maiden name, Byles, I'm usually called. Come in, come in; tho' I 'low ye're a stranger ter me, ye're welcome all the same, sir! Ye must be cold, ef ye're rid fur, set by the fire and warm!"

She bustled about with, shy, simple hospitality, but the stranger stood silent, his eyes noting everything; the sanded floor, the spinning-wheel in the corner, the strings of dried apples on the wall, the queer deft plates on the dresser shelves,—then his gaze came back to the pretty, faded woman with her appealing eyes. His breath came short and hard—he grew pale.

"Mother," he said.

For a few seconds not a word was said. The clock ticked loudly, the cat purred in the sunlight, a foolish fly lured from its sleeping place bozzed on the window-panes. Hannah's eyes dilated. She bent forward.

"Man, ye said mother! Who in God's name are ye?"

"Your son Robert. Heavens she is dying!"

He caught her, and laid her on the settle. She heard his words as through a mist.

Yes, this was death. A spirit had come to her from the next world! Bobby had been sent to fetch her. She was ready,—but she heard faintly Reuben's pitiful whimper, and her gentle heart reached back to the poor, helpless lad, and the dumb creatures she was leaving—if she could just have seen the neighbors, to give them into their charge.

But as the moments went by, and the faintness passed, she grew conscious of a strange reality about this man who was chafing her hands. She heard the fire crackling, the tame robin chirping in his cage, and the words that were spoken by the warm breathing lips.

"Father took me away from here when I was a baby. I always thought you died when I was born. I came to find you as soon as I knew the truth." The story stopped there. He could

(Continued on fourth page.)