The Acton Free Press.

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The Acton Free Press

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—AT THE—

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Editor and Proprietor.

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HIGH GRADE WEEKLY NEWS.
The paper used in this journal is from the above mills.
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— ON —
Good Farm Security
— AT A —
Lower Rate of Interest and on Better Terms of Repayment
Than ever before offered in Canada.
Intending Borrowers
Should write or call at once and be convinced before applying elsewhere.
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—FROM THE—
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—MEANS—
Enterprise, Character,
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ILLUSTRATED CIRCULAR SENT FREE TO ANY ADDRESS.
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We want you to see our
New Stock
OF
Plated Ware, Carvers, Cutlery AND Lamps,
Bought especially for
THE CHRISTMAS TRADE.
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Christmas Presents FREE
A present to everybody who will buy their
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During the Holidays. Such an offer is rare. Come early, our prices are the lowest, our goods are the best.
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Our Wall papers
Are said to be the best selected in the city.
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The Finest Range of Choice
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Poetry.

CHRISTMAS.

Breaking on the twilight stillness,
Listen to the Christmas chimes:
They have brought the same glad tidings
More than eighteen hundred times—
Peace on earth!

Let the bells ring out the joy of the nations
Jesus the babe of the manger, is King:
He is the highest who once was the lowest,
Let all the children be joyful and sing
Peace and good-will, strife shall be still,
The babe of the manger is King."

Ring, ye bells! 'tis sweet to listen,
Sing, ye friends outside the door,
Echoes of that wonderous music
That was heard in days of yore.
Dress the house with holly,
Let the bright red berries shine,
While we celebrate the birth-night
Of our gracious Lord divine.

Then peal'd the bells more loud and deep,
"God is not dead? nor doth He sleep!
The Wrong shall fall, the Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"
—*Longfellow.*

Select Family Reading.

Mrs. Marsh's Christmas Party.

Mrs. Marsh sat at the old red secretary that had been her great grandfather's, writing names on two slips of paper in a stiff, angular hand.

She was a good-looking old woman, with no little force of character indicated in her firm chin, her dark and still lustrous eyes, and tightly compressed lips.

The day was cold, but bright and sunny, and Christmas was near at hand.

It had snowed the night before, a light, feathery snow, and it still clung to the leafless branches of every tree and shrub, hid their bareness and blackness, and making them wondrously beautiful.

Old Mrs. Marsh was a woman who thought little about the beauties of nature, and she never gushed about anything, but when Jane Day, her one servant, came into the room to ask if she should "smash" or "just bile" the potatoes for dinner, Mrs. Marsh had said:

"The trees look beautiful to-day, don't they, Jane?"

"They do, ma'am, for a fact," replied Jane. "It must look like Parrydiso over yonder in the woods."

"Paradise, Jane? I hope there isn't going to be any snow in Paradise. I'm chilly all the time in winter. Where's Letty?"

Letty came into the room at that moment. She was a slender, pretty young girl of eighteen, with a delicate pink and white complexion, and eyes like her Grandmother Marsh's but larger and more velvety.

They had never yet sparkled with the wrath that sometimes made the old lady's eyes what Jane Day called "killin' black."

It had been a long time since Letty had seen her grandmother seated at the old secretary, for her grandmother had given nearly all of her correspondence to Letty herself.

"Writing letters, grandmother?"

"No, I am not." Then she laid down her pen and said:

"I'm making out a list of persons I want to send some invitations to.

"Invitations?"

"I said invitations."

The old lady spoke sharply, and her voice had a note of irritation as she said:

"I'm going to have a party Christmas evening and invite my friends."

She accented the last word strangely, and her still strong and firm voice grew harsh as she added: "Yes, Letty Marsh, I'm going to let some folks in and around Derby know just what I think of them. I'll let them know that their room's better'n their company at my house, and that I don't want anything to do with them."

"Why, grandma!"

The only lady went on harshly:

"There's folks here in Derby that's told stories about me, and done all they could to injure and spite me in all sorts of belittlin' ways. I know 'em through, and I'll let 'em know that I know 'em, too! I'll give 'em something to talk about!"

The old lady's faded cheeks had grown rosy, and her black eyes were sparkling behind her spectacles, and she had patted the floor steadily and angrily with one of her small slippered feet.

Letty stared in silence. She had not seen her grandmother so "worked up" for a long time.

"I've been all the morning making out a list of the names of them I'm going to invite as well as a list of those I'm not going to invite; and—Letty!"

Mrs. Marsh looked sharply at the girl over the top of her glasses.

"Well, grandma?"

"I haven't invited George Parks, and I don't intend inviting him.

Letty's face crimsoned, and she did not look at her grandmother.

"No, I suppose not," she said.

"No, I haven't" said Mrs. Marsh, "it'll be just as good a way as any of letting him know that I'm not going to have him hanging around you so much. I never did think much of that Parks family."

She turned to her desk and put the cork in her ink bottle, wiped her pen carefully on a bit of chamois skin, and put her writing materials away carefully, doing everything in a neat precise way.

"I wish," she said to Letty, who had sat down in a big chintz-covred rocking chair, and was pretending to read a paper she had taken up, "I wish you'd go into the village after dinner and see if Netty Lake can come to-morrow and write out and address these invitations for me. You write a very neat hand, but Netty does all sorts of fancy writing.

"I've heard she's taken to writing cards and invitations and things of that kind to help support herself since her father died. She's a nice girl, and it'll help her along a little and give her more spending money for Christmas if I hire her to do this writing for me."

Netty Lake came out to the Marsh house the next morning. She was a bright, tidy-looking young woman, still wearing mourning for her parents, who had left her quite alone in the world, and partly dependent on her own exertions for her support.

Letty had gone into Derby to spend the day with one of her girl friends. Letty had been an orphan for years, and had always lived with her Grandmother Marsh.

"Now I'll tell you just what I want you to do, Netty. I am going to have a Christmas party, and I want you to write the invitations for it, and make 'em neat and elegant as you can. You'll find everything you want right there in the secretary. Write one for yourself, too, Netty."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Marsh, I'll write mine first, for practice, and then show it to you to see if the form suits you."

"Very, well; that's a good idea. You'll find a list of names of the persons to be invited on a slip of blue paper in the box of writing paper."

"I must go now and see to my mince-meat, I prefer to make my own. Then it's done to suit me."

She went out into her exquisitely tidy kitchen, and Netty sat down before the old red secretary and wrote a well-worded and neat invitation in a clear round hand. Then she took it out to the kitchen and read it to Mrs. Marsh.

"That'll do very well," said the old lady approvingly. "I'm not used to giving parties, and I don't know just what the latest wrinkle in invitations is, but I'm very well pleased with that. You found the list of names?"

"Yes, I have it."

"Then you may go ahead and write the invitations, and if it wouldn't be too much trouble, I'll have you take 'em into Derby with you and mail 'em for me. They ought to have been sent out before, but I never thought of giving this party until yesterday."

"No trouble at all. I'll be very glad to mail them for you."

They were all written, sealed, stamped and tied up in a neat package before noon.

"But you ain't going home before dinner, Netty?" Mrs. Marsh said, when Netty asked for her hat and cloak.

"Yes, I must. I have some copying to do for Squire Padgett, and I told him I'd call for it before noon, if I could. I'll mail the invitations on my way to his office, and I'll be sure to come myself. I know we'll have a lovely time. It's very kind of you to go to so much trouble for the pleasure of others, although, of course, it will be a pleasure to you to have your friends around you."

"Yes," said Mrs. Marsh, in an abstracted manner, "yes, that's so, Netty," and then she added, a little defiantly, "but I'm giving this party on purpose to spite certain persons. I know it ain't the right spirit, but I can't help it. I've stood a good deal from some that ain't never had no call to abuse me, and I can see right through the hypocrisy of others who pretend to be my friends."

Preparations for the party went actively on, but Letty took little part in them, and it was evident that she had small interest in the event.

She would have looked forward to it with such eagerness and would have been so happy in helping to arrange and plan everything if George Parks had been invited.

He had known Letty all his life, and he was very fond of her, and she had lately come to realize that George was dearer to her than anyone else in the world.

Mrs. Marsh was a warm and true friend to those who had basked in the sunshine of her friendship, and she felt her heart glow with affection for those old and favored friends as she dressed in her best silk and laces to receive them on this Christmas night.

Her house was aglow with warmth and light. The rooms were tastefully decorated with plants and holly and Christmas wreaths.

She had met with no disappointment in her cakes, rolls or salads! All had gone well.

She thought of the pleasure her friends would find in the preparations she had made for their entertainment, and she wished that the uninvited might have a peep into her dining room and thus have a fuller appreciation of what they had missed because of their antagonism to her.

Thoughts of these unbidden persons were uppermost in Mrs. Marsh's mind as she dressed to receive her guests.

She had been too busy all day to think much about anything but her household duties, and there had been little of the Christmas spirit in her activity.

She had planned to give herself a half-hour or more of quiet rest in her room before the guests should arrive.

In this half-hour something of the true Christmas spirit came into the heart of Mrs. Marsh.

She had gone to a window of her room, and was looking out into the Christmas night as fair and peaceful a night as it must have been all those centuries ago when the shepherds watching their flocks saw that the bright star in the east, that herald of peace on earth and good will toward men. As she looked at the Christmas stars and out over the snow-covered fields toward the town, she could see lights twinkling in the homes of the persons she had willfully offended and put a slight upon. She could see between her house and the village the humble home of Esther Parks.

A home in which she had once been a welcome guest, she thought suddenly of the quarrel between them. It had been, after all, for a trifling cause, and Mrs. Marsh remembered suddenly how they had been girls together. They were old women now with little time left to make their peace with each other and with God.

And there was old Mrs. Lewis. She remembered now how she had come and stayed with her when Letty's father was born, and they had been such dear friends then.

So many forgotten deeds of kindness were suddenly remembered; so many dead memories were suddenly quickened into life.

A party of young people went by in a sleigh. They were singing an old Christmas carol. Their voices rang out clearly and sweetly on the frosty air. The old woman at the window heard them distinctly as they sang:

"Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface.

"Glad tidings, glad tidings,
For all that are astray,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
Was born on Christmas Day."

She stood at the window several minutes after the singers had gone down the road, then turned and walked across the room with traces of tears on her face.

"I oughtn't to have done it," she said to herself in keen self-reproach. "I oughtn't to have done such a thing right at Christmas time. It's no time to feel malice. I'd ought to have charity then, if at no other time.

"There hasn't been a bit of the holy tide of Christmas' in my heart, and there oughtn't to be anything else in the heart of an old woman like me.

"I've been hard and bitter toward my enemies always; I ain't known what charity was; I'm a wicked old woman. Poor old Esther Parks, and Lucinda Drake, and Hannah Deane, and all the others I've tried to spite will feel that"—

The door bell rang sharply, and Mrs. Marsh hurriedly wiped her eyes and went down stairs to welcome her first guests. The mistling of her handsome silk sounded hateful to her, and the Christmas decoration seemed a sort of mockery.

Two persons were standing in the hall below—a young man and an old woman.

The old woman was struggling with a woolen muffler wrapped around her bonnet, for the night was very cool. She came forward eagerly, but with a feeble gait, when she saw Mrs. Marsh.

"Oh, Lucy!" she said with outstretched arms.

"Why, Esther! Esther Parks!" cried Mrs. Marsh, and her hands clasped those of the other old woman, and their arms went around each other's necks.

"I made George fetch me early a-purpose, so I could see you a minute or two 'fore the others came," said old Mrs. Parks, brokenly. "I was so 'fraid I couldn't come; my rheumatiz has been real bad this winter, and I've coughed a good deal. But I've saved up my strength, and George brought me in a sleigh. I was bound to come the minnit I got your invitation, and—"

"My invitation, Esther?"

"Yes, Lucy; and I never in all the days of my life was so glad to git anything. You don't know how much I've wanted to make up, and I nearly cried my two eyes out over that invitation. I'd come over right then and see you, only I wanted to save up for to-night, and—"

The door-bell rang again, and the next minute Mrs. Marsh was saying:

"Why, Hannah Deane?"

"Did you think I wouldn't come?" cried Mrs. Deane, excitedly, and in a high voice suggestive of tears. "Nothing could have kept me away. I've kept away from you too long now, Lucy. My husband's with me. He's out blanketing the horses; but I couldn't wait another instant to see you, and tell you how I cried over that blessed invitation of yours.

"It made me so sorry for all the petty, hateful past, and I wouldn't have missed coming to-night for—here's Mr. and Mrs. Drake, Lucy."

"Lucinda Drake!" said Mrs. Marsh.

"O, Lucy!" and Mrs. Drake could say no more, but silently put her arms around Mrs. Marsh, and they kissed each other with streaming eyes.

A second shrill, high-pitched old voice suddenly cried out gleefully—

"Well, I've come, Lucy Marsh! Here I be, an' it's the fust time I've been out at night for five years. But I said, the minute I got the invite, that I was a-comin' for you'd come more'n half way in asking me to come, an' I was bound to come the other half, an' here I be."

"I—I—am so glad to see you, Abbie Lyman."

"Oh, I knowed you wanted me to come, or you wouldn't have sent me. There never was any two-faceedness about you, Lucy, an' I'm goin to say right here, 'fore av'rybody, that I was a deal the most to blame in that old trouble between us."

"Oh, no, no," said Mrs. Marsh, quickly; it was my fault, Abbie. But we won't say anything more about it."

"But I don't hold any spite, Lucy."

"Nor I, Abbie—not a bit. It's Christmas time, you know."

The arrivals followed each other in quick succession.

Mrs. Marsh was too dazed to try to fathom the mystery of it all until Netty Lake came, and then she drew her aside to say: "Netty, Netty, there's been a mistake of some kind. I didn't invite one of these persons here."

"Why, Mrs. Marsh!"

"I didn't, Netty. Don't you remember I told you that I was going to have the party to—to—spite certain ones? Well, these are the people I intended spiting. I can't make it out."

"Well, Mrs. Marsh, I wrote the invitations and sent them to the persons whose names I found on the slip of paper in the box of paper in the secretary, and"—

"Just wait a minute," and Mrs. Marsh hastily left the room. Netty heard her open the secretary, and in a moment she came back.

"Netty Lake, I gave you the wrong list of names, and I destroyed the right one!"

"Why, Mrs. Marsh!" Netty looked frightened.

"But, Netty, as it's turned out, I really gave you the right list and burned the one I ought to have burned.

"It's all right. Don't you worry. I'll explain matters to those who'll think they've been slighted, and I can have another party or something. I'm so glad it's turned out as it has. Just look at my Letty and George Parks sitting over in that corner? Did you ever see two happier-looking youngsters? He is a fine, manly-looking young fellow, isn't he?"

"I s'pose I'll have to give a wedding party some of these days."

"Don't you ever breathe to any one that I didn't invite these people here. I'm a thousand times happier than I'd been if the others had come instead.

"Here comes dear old Esther Parks and Hannah Deane. I'm going to take them out into the dining-room and show them how nice the table looks, and get them a cup of coffee in advance. Esther always used to say that my coffee was coffee.

At midnight Mrs. Marsh again stood at a window, looking out into the Christmas night.

The kindly good-bye's of her guests still sounded pleasantly in her ears.

Her heart was full because of the tender words they had said at parting.

By her side, on a table, were the little gifts some of them had brought her—good-will gifts and offerings of peace. All the old enmities forgiven.

The sleigh-load of young people who had passed the house early in the evening now went by on their homeward way, and Mrs. Marsh's lips moved with an unspoken 'Amen' as they sang:

"All glory to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Good-will henceforth from heaven to men
Begin and never cease."

THE OLD BACHELOR'S SOLILOQUY.

Wisht that I was little snow, ter stay so fer awhile,
With no botherin' er frettin' all the day;
For life went purty easy when I worked for mother's smile,
An' the losses didn' last as long as play.
Know I oster write to Santy all the lengin's of my days
While the firelight danced an' flickered on the floor;
An' watch the letter fly'n up the chimbly in a blaze!
But Santa doesn't hark to hey no more.

I knowed thet Santy'd bring the things I wanted of I'se good,
An' I oster be er chipper er a bee;
An' I'd do my chores up lively, totin' pails and splittin' wood;
Ther wan't no young un pleasanter then me.
But now I'm old an' saddened, an' when Christmas time is come
I keep thinkin' o' the times that's gone before;
An' it makes me long fer childhood an' the dear old kentry home;
Fer Santy Claus won't come to me no more!

The joints and muscles are so lubricated by Hood's Sarsaparilla that all rheumatism and stiffness soon disappear. Try it.

Oh, beautiful Christmas Day,
Begun with the golden morn,
You come, you come to a waiting world,
With the tidings that Christ is born.
You tell it to listening ears,
The story so grand, so true,
Oh, beautiful, beautiful Christmas Day!
The story so old, yet new.

You whisper of joy and hope;
You tell us of Heaven's great plan;
Of peace, sweet peace, and joy on earth,
And of God's good will to man.
You say to the sad: "Look up!"
To the weary ones: "Now rest!"
Oh, beautiful, beautiful Christmas Day,
Of all bright days are the best!

Ring out, ye Christmas bells,
And carry the tidings on,
That we may have a heaven below
Through God's anointed Son!
Let the men and maidens sing;
Let the children all rejoice;
While a ransomed world lifts up
Its universal voice.

Oh, beautiful Christmas Day,
Shining forth like a jeweled crown,
With cheer for each trusting soul,
From the aged patriarch down!
Let it wipe away our tears,
Of sin and sorrow born,
On this beautiful, beautiful Christmas Day,
Begun with the golden morn.

—*Mrs. M. A. Kidder.*

THE LITTLE STRANGER.

There is a popular household story that is repeated year after year to German children at the beginning of the Christmas holidays, to kindle the spirit of charity, which illustrates to the child mind the words of our Lord: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." In Germany every child passes through fairyland, and receives the great truths of moral and spiritual life in parables. The story is substantially as follows:

In a little cottage on the borders of a large forest there once lived a poor woodchopper, with his wife and two children. He was a good and pious man, but was scarcely able to earn enough to provide food for his family. For all that he began his daily duties with prayer, and ended them with praise, and the family were very happy.

His children's names were Valentine and Marie.

One snowy evening when the woodchopper came home, he brought with him some evening boughs, and after the evening meal began to hang them over the mantel-piece.

"Christmas is here," said he, "and I have no presents for you; but we will offer to the Lord the beautiful alters of grateful hearts. God will bless us."

He then said grace at the simple table, as they gathered around it to partake of the evening meal. There came a knock at the door.

"Who is there?" asked the woodchopper.

"A homeless child."

"Come in."

A child entered, very beautiful, but in ragged clothing, and stood before the fire.

"Who are you?" asked the woodchopper, kindly. "Whence do you come?"

"I am a stranger, and have no home," answered the child.

"Come to the table, little stranger," said Marie. "There is not bread enough for us both; you shall have my supper."

"And I will let you sleep in my bed, said Valentine. "There is not room enough for two. I will sleep on the floor."

The family sang their evening hymn,—

"The woods are all silent,

and the little stranger quickly fell asleep in Valentine's bed.

At midnight the family was awakened by the sound of music without the door. The storm had ceased, and the stars shone clear in the old sky. Very sweet music it was.

"Hark!" said Marie. "It is the song of children. What do they sing?"

"Listen!" said Valentine. The family was still and the voices sing:

"O happy home, to heaven nighest,
Wherein Thou, Little Stranger, liest."

Like the softly attuned musical glasses seemed the music out of which rose the carol. The family heard it with delight.

The song was repeated:

"O happy home, to heaven nighest,
Wherein Thou, Little Stranger, liest."

The music drifted away as in a cloud of light, higher and higher, and was lost in the air. In the morning the Little Stranger woke, and said that He must go.

"You will be blest," He said, simply, "because you took me in. Take this sprig of evergreen," He added, breaking a twig from the tree that the cotter had brought home, "and plant it, and you shall one day know Who I am."

It was a sprig of the fir.

The cotter did as he was bidden, and the sprig grew, and the fir-tree bore silver nuts and golden apples, and Marie and Valentine never again knew the want of food or a bed, or of an abundant Christmas table.

It was the first Christmas-tree.

Who was the Little Stranger?

THE CHRISTMAS JESTER.

Christmas Punch—A boring match on the 25th of December.

"You should always look at Christmas trees with a fir-tive glance.

"I wonder how they scratched up so many of the presents."—"Oh, with Santa Claws."

Mrs. Brown—"We're going to put you in long trousers. "Little Johnnie—"Wait till after Christmas."

Cumso—"Do you know what is the latest thing in kids?" Mrs. Cumso—"No; tell me what is it?" Cumso—"Christmas candy."

Mr. Fashion—"Do you like a white Christmas, Miss Fashion—"Yes it agrees with my complexion."

Spiggot—"Santa Claus ought to be provided with wings." Bloobumper—"What for?" Spiggot—"To go down the flew with."

"And what did you get in your stocking Christmas morning, Johnny?" asked the district visitor.—"Me fut," replied Johnny, tersely and gloomily.

Pretty girl (at the florist's blushing.)—Isn't this mistletoe very high? Florist.—Well, Miss, you know it has to be high enough for you to stand under it.

Three things I ask for Christmas Day:
To wit: a heavy fall of show,
My Phyllis with me in a sleigh,
And then a bunch of mistletoe.

"The Christmas spirit"—began Gassam. "Well, what is the Christmas spirit?" asked Maddox. "What the stockings get full on, I suppose."